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THE CITY OF REFUGE

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THE CITY OF REFUGE

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'CHILDREN OF GIBEON,'

'THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

BOOK II.

AFTER FOUR WEEKS

(CONTINUED).

CHAPTER		PAGE
XII.	REVOLUTION - - - -	1
XIII.	WHAT IS HER NAME? - - -	25
XIV.	HUSBAND AND WIFE - - -	58
XV.	BACK AGAIN - - - -	94
XVI.	THE MASTER ABDICATES - - -	126
XVII.	THE ORDEAL BY CARDS - - -	156
XVIII.	FREEDOM - - - - -	193

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THE CITY OF REFUGE

CHAPTER XII.

REVOLUTION.

The expulsion of a brother from the Monastery was an event so remarkable that one might imagine that it would be the subject of abiding comment. Brother Charles was criticised ; Brother Charles was ordered to depart on or before Saturday. As you will presently learn, he did depart. Yet, if you ask the Community about him now, you will find that the event and the man are both forgotten. If the erring brother is remembered at all it is on account of his very

remarkable and aristocratic appearance — accounted for by the tradition of the British nobleman forced to leave his native country on account of profligacy. The reason of this speedy oblivion was that there followed upon his expulsion a series of epoch-making events.

What happened was nothing short of Revolution.

By those who delight in searching out the hidden causes of things it is always averred that the real originator of the rebellion was none other than Gilbert Maryon. For, they say, when that brother arrived, the House was fast drifting into an unquestioning spirit —a simple vacuity of mind—which would seem to be the frame most to be desired by those who meditate continually. If you neither talk, nor read, nor think, nor desire, nor hope, nor fear, vacuity is the result. In this most desirable frame of mind, Meditation is always possible, at any time of day or night—and if people believe that in Medita-

tion they achieve heights and raptures of which they remember nothing when they return, then, of course, Meditation is the most desirable of all conditions, and therefore *à priori*, vacuity; and therefore—it is like a proposition in Euclid—total abstinence from all disturbing causes of every kind. To be sure, had the House gone too far in that respect, no one would have been able to do any work, and so they would all starve either into death or activity; in either case they would lose the power of Meditation; they would have to climb down. In other words, the logical end and result of the cultivation of trance would be clearly a choice between starvation or a return to earthly laws—which means work in return for food. The Master recognised this alternative when he enjoined daily work; but he had not foreseen the danger of mental vacuity—which would render work impossible.

Gilbert startled them into wakefulness; he

disturbed them; he broke the Rule about frivolous talk, and talked with all of them who were still capable of speech. He talked during Fatigue; during Recreation; during Restoration. He was curious about their reasons for joining the Community; he wanted to know why they had left Outside; he revived the Past, which many of them would willingly have seen buried and done with, and all had agreed to forget if they could. He wanted also to know what they remembered about Meditation.

Everybody knows that whenever two or three are gathered together with the avowed intention of seeing what nobody else can see, of hearing voices which nobody else can hear, and of receiving communications which advance nobody, there is an irresistible temptation to 'go one better.' Everyone wishes to be thought more richly endowed with spookishness than his neighbours. Hence whispers, mystery, affectation, and

pretensions. It was admitted by all that the greatest achievements were those of the Master, who, as a true visionary, gave himself no airs at all. Now, by the simple process of cross-examination, Gilbert arrived at the discovery that nobody, except the Master and Cicely, ever remembered what they saw in Meditation. In sleep one sometimes gets dreams; there is some reason in going to sleep; in Meditation no one gets anything except oblivion for an hour.

Gilbert made this discovery public. That is to say, he communicated it to every one who still preserved the power of speech and thought. And it made them uneasy. Their pride was hurt—their pride in themselves, and their pride in each other. Those who pretended, and had succeeded in deceiving themselves, were angry and out of conceit with the whole business; those who were modest, and only hoped to arrive, some time or other, at the Elevation claimed by others,

had their hopes dashed to the ground, on hearing that there was no proof of Elevation or Higher Plains. What is the use of soaring to the peaks of the Himalayas where dwell those philosophers whose wisdom compared with our wisdom is reported to be as Lombard Street compared with a China orange, if one remembers nothing on returning? These things, and such things as these, were whispered about. Except for the most vacuous, who could do no more than eat, drink, sleep, and meditate, the peace of the House was disturbed; an agitation went on below the surface; the members began to talk again, and with animation.

Then fell upon them suddenly the news of the morning's work. Everything was known. Sister Euphemia, indignant with the Committee, yet delighted with the discomfiture of the pair who had brought about the mischief, ran about and told everybody. Brother Gilbert and Sister Cicely had been criticised

for entertaining a Single Attachment to the danger of their Elevation; they had been ordered to marry where they could not be expected to entertain any kind of Single Attachment; they had rebelled; Brother Gilbert had boldly carried off the girl, and they were now launched into Outside—an awful, perilous position for a pair so young and so singly attached. What terrible thing would happen to them? For they had all become like children in their dread of the Unknown and the Wild.

'Nothing,' said Sister Euphemia gloomily. 'That is, nothing bad will happen to *them*. The bad things will happen to us. For they are gone; they will never come back to us again. Love will make them too happy. Do you think that I should have come here twenty years ago if Love had made me as happy as I hoped? Certainly not. We may meditate, and rise to Heights—though nobody remembers anything about it—but we

can't be happy without Love. No; it isn't in nature.'

'Happiness is not to be desired,' replied another sister. 'There's nothing to be desired but Elevation. We all know that.'

'The question is how to get it,' said Sister Euphemia. 'The more I think about it, which is all day long, the more I feel that I'd rather get it through Love than through Meditation. At all events, that way you see what you've got. By Meditation you don't see anything, and so you don't know what you've got when you have got it!'

And then they heard that Sister Phœbe, that most rigid observer of the Rule, the first at Meditation, the first at Fatigue, the austere, the uncompromising, the manager of the Dairy, had been also criticised; and with her, Brother Silas, Silas the Silent, the champion Meditator, Silas, the Director of the Farm. Criticised! These two! If such things could be done to the chief among

them, what might be done to the least? And these two, who had been willing to sacrifice their own inclinations for the good of others even so far as to marry the two rebels, had been actually ordered to marry each other!

All these things together caused a condition of restless excitement which spread from one to the other, and loosened tongues, and caused eager discussion. Yet there were some unmoved by these, or any other events, who sat apart in silent vacuity, with empty brains, happy, if that can be called happiness where there is nothing left but bodily pain and the physical satisfaction of food. These, his disciples, were to the Master a continual source of satisfaction: he thought that they were uplifted, even to the severance of soul and body; he thought they were soaring, like himself, upwards to other worlds peopled by men and women advanced to wisdom unattainable here and to enjoyment inconceivable. And all with-

out the least aids of instruction, exhortation, reading, prayer, or praise, such as in every other religion have always been found necessary. Think, if you can, of the glorious conditions of that country in which, as in this House, the material wants of every man should be secured for him without any anxiety or trouble on his own part. Think, if you can, of the splendid spirit of enterprise which would grow up among a people who had already all that they desired. Think, if you can, of a community cut off from the outside world, forbidden to read, forbidden to speak except of things necessary, deprived of aims and ambitions.

They were not all reduced to the condition naturally resulting from these rules; many were still open to reason and to observation. With these the whispers grew into murmurs; the murmurs swelled; the verandah was crowded with fifty or sixty members, all talking at once and all talking loudly.

Then rang the supper bell, loud and discordant. They stopped talking, and all together as usual trooped into the Hall.

Sister Phœbe and Brother Silas occupied their customary places opposite each other; the bride's face was red and angry, the bridegroom's sullen and resentful. Brother Charles—he whom the Committee had ordered to leave the House—occupied his own place, taking his food in his usual cold and gloomy silence. The places of Brother Gilbert and Sister Cicely were empty—it was true, then, they had fled. In his chair sat the Master, but with hanging head and heavy looks; everybody knew that Cicely was to the old man as a daughter. Yet he had driven her away; so admirable was his faith in his own teaching. No one, to be sure, has ever heard of a crank who shrank from acting, even to his own injury and unhappiness, up to his own crankiness; and if the members of a crank's own household

should refuse obedience, belief, and conformity, what must happen to them? The answer to this question is perfectly well understood by every woman who has a father or a husband in the tents of Crankiness. Wherefore, if women, instead of men, had framed the Liturgy, they would have added a special clause for protection against the crank; and above all against the religious crank.

Cicely was gone; the Master had himself driven her out; and now he sat in mourning which would last his life through, and beyond.

There was more than simple mourning in the Master's mind. He had lost the child. That was much. But he could not, as usual, send forth his soul into the unseen world for sweet commune with the child's mother; his spirit was heavy as lead within him; perhaps, he thought, the mother was angry with him. Had she not always loved her own husband, that pure and spotless saint? Yet he had acted on his own

teaching, and in the spiritual interests of the child. Would the mother desert him? If he was to be deprived both of his spiritual sister and his spiritual daughter, what would become of him?

You have heard of the music with which, during supper, their souls were lifted up. The piano was played for them by a German, the only musician in the House. This evening the piano was closed. The musician took his place at the tables.

'No,' he said, with tears in his eyes, 'I cannot play no more. The little girl'—he called her 'Ze leedle curl,' but we must make allowance for emotion—'she has gone away. For five years have I played to make her dance when you have done what you call your dance — your crawl' — he called it 'grawl,' which one writes down, not in foolish ridicule, but because it really seems a word which very well describes the uncouth dance or shuffle of the members. It was not

a crawl so much as a 'grawl.' 'For five years, to be rewarded every evening with her lovely dance at the end. Her dance was my joy. When she stopped I could feel my soul flying right out of my head and going up—right up, going up high—so high, that I don't know nosings where I am. No. I play no more. The little girl is gone.'

So he sat down, and began to drink coffee with as much avidity as if it had been Vienna beer.

They knew not what he meant by the little girl's dancing. They never saw her dance. Nobody had ever seen her dance. Their one walk-round, or double shuffle, or 'grawl,' that many of them performed for soothing purposes every night before going off, they knew, of course. But what did he mean by the joy of seeing the little girl dance? However, they sat down, and in unwonted excitement they broke the bread of the evening meal.

When supper was finished, the Englishman known as Brother Charles rose and went out, as he had done every evening since his arrival. The others assumed their usual position; leaning their backs against the table, with feet outstretched, with hands folded, and their heads leaning slightly down. Some of them—those who have been indicated as the more advanced in vacuity—went off instantly. Of the rest it was noticed that the Master was restless; as a rule he lost no time in getting his soul under weigh; this evening he fidgeted and changed his position; he crossed his legs, he laid his hand on the table, he supported his head on the other hand, he kept his eyes closed; but it was obvious to all that he was neither asleep nor in Meditation. Sister Phœbe and Brother Silas, in general most zealous in Meditation, were equally restless; and at least half the members fidgeted in their places, getting no nearer the point of

absorption. Some of them, without the aid of the music, tried their shuffling dance, but it proved powerless to soothe anyone. In a word, for the first time the Community were unable to meditate; they remained wide awake; they became only more wide awake the longer they sat there.

Then Sister Euphemia arose and spoke. She made a great speech.

'Brothers and sisters,' she said, 'a very terrible and cruel thing has been done in the House this day.' Sister Phœbe groaned. 'I mean to say what I think. Those of us who have gone off won't hear; those of us who can't go off may say what they please. I don't care what they say. A cruel thing it was. I was on the Committee, but I couldn't help it. They took Cicely, that sweet child, the only pretty thing in the House, and they took Gilbert, the only man in the place who's awake and real, and they drove them into rebellion. They've run away together.

Will they come back again? I don't think so.'

Nobody answered her. She went on with what turned out to be a long sermon.

'Brothers and sisters, we're a frumpy lot. There's nothing interesting about any of us except those two. We pretend to forget our Past—we shut our eyes and pretend that it isn't there. Most of us have got a dismal Past—I have, for one—I've pretended to forget it for twenty years. But Gilbert showed me that I hadn't. A bad Past—some of us have got. But those two haven't got any Past at all. Some said that Gilbert was a British lord, and therefore a profligate. He isn't. He's only a well-behaved young gentleman, and he loves the girl, down to the very ground she walks upon.

'I've seen it growing with both of them. I've sat under the trees with my knitting, and watched them, timid and shy, and trying to explain. Oh! as if I didn't know what it

means! As if I could ever forget the Past! It made me so happy that I can't tell you, only to look on, till I saw that they understood each other at last. And then they were criticised. Sakes alive! What for?

'They told the girl—that delicate, dainty flower—that she was to marry a man who's little better than a stable boy: his place is in the farmyard among the pigs and the straw—look at him! And they told the young man, who's just as sensitive as any lady, that he was to marry a woman ten years older than himself, with no more feelings than the cheese-press and no more manners than a dairymaid—look at her! So they've run away. And what those two poor lambs will do out in the wide world the good Lord only knows!

'They loved each other,' she went on, growing more eloquent. 'Oh! why did I come here out of the world? It was to forget the misery of lost love. Why did

they run away? To escape the misery of lost love. What does the Committee know of love? Nothing. What does the Master know of love? Nothing. He tells us to avoid Single Attachments. I've been here twenty years, I'm the oldest member next to the Master, and I've never seen one person advanced an inch by keeping out of Single Attachments—not one inch. Only here and there a saint like the Master comes out perhaps—I don't know for sure—the stronger for being alone all the time. And even he, if you come to think of it, loved the girl. I've been looking on for twenty years. I've never spoken before, because I wanted to forget the Past, and all that I had to say depended on my own past experience. But I will say it now, if it's only just for once. I look round, I say, and I see that we are all of us, all together, except the Master, growing selfish more and more. The Master says we stand every one alone. So we do,

I dare say, but we stand in a crowd as well, and we ought to help each other all we can, and to lean on each other, and to think more about each other than about ourselves. There is no support or encouragement to be got here from anybody: we are looking out, every one for himself. We are like pigs feeding in a trough, each helping himself; we have no thought, nor pity, nor care for any one but ourselves. Oh! my friends, this is the end of our beautiful community!

'Why, when Gilbert came—bless him!—we had almost through long silence lost the power of speech altogether. We had left off asking how it fared with the Soul. We were dropping into a deadly, dismal, selfish silence. Was that what we came here for?

'What do we see when we go off in Meditation? Eh! I ask any of you what do we see? I have been here twenty years—all the time mistaking forgetfulness for Elevation — every evening I make that mistake—same as all of us. I don't want

that any more. I want to remember, not to forget. What do we get out of Meditation but forgetfulness? Does anybody get anything else? Does any one,' she repeated earnestly—'any one in this room—any one who's awake and can answer—get anything else? Does any one remember anything that he saw, or heard, or felt in Meditation?'

'I remember,' said the musician, 'a little girl and a lovely dance. And now she's gone.'

'Hold up hands all of you who remember anything of last night's Meditation.'

Not a hand was held up.

'Why?' she asked triumphantly, feeling her own strength. 'Meditation is a lovely thing. The Master is carried up to the Heavens in Meditation. When he comes back, he remembers. Why do we remember nothing? Because we have been going down — down — down — getting more and more selfish, more silent, each for himself more and more. That is why.'

The company murmured. Then one of

them, one of the younger women, yet a woman of thirty or so, rose and spoke in her turn.

'What Sister Euphemia says is true. I remember nothing—I have got nothing out of Meditation. But this is a Home to me, and there is no other Home in all the world except this—for me. I cannot forget the Past, because I know that if I go back again there is not one of all the people—the people—the dear people who loved me once——' her voice broke down—'who would take me in and love me again. I couldn't dare ask it.' She sat down and covered her face.

'Poor dear!' said Euphemia. 'She cannot forget the Past: can any one among us forget the Past?

'What are we to do, then?

'We must become brothers and sisters in reality. We must love each other as much as we can. We must work for each other and help each other. We must make the

younger members marry for love; we must have children among us; we must make our lives happier. Oh! I see a thousand ways. Leave it to me. You men, leave it to the sisters: they are brighter than you because they talk more. And you women, to-morrow we will talk.'

Then the musician arose and walked solemnly to the piano, which he opened with the air of an officiating clergyman. He looked round, and he said, 'Let us sing.'

He played a German folk-song, and began to sing it himself in a full powerful baritone. The Community had never before heard any singing, except the light voice of Cicely at her work. They listened. They knew no words; presently they began to join in one by one. At last they were all singing—a song literally without words; high up in the astonished rafters rolled and rang the voices of those who sang, one with another. There was no longer the least desire for Meditation;

the vacuous expression went out of their faces ; life and light returned.

The singing was at its height when the Master, who had not been meditating, but was absorbed in gloomy reflection and forebodings, became aware of something unusual. He looked round him, rose, and walked out of the Hall without remark.

At last they grew tired of singing.

'Now,' cried the leader, the deliverer, the new Joan of Arc, 'we have begun, and we will go on. To-morrow we must let them all know what we mean. There's going to be a change in our ways. Those who please may meditate. For my own part I have meditated for twenty long years, and nothing at all has come of it. I shall try for the Higher Life by talking and singing and helping the others.'

Thus simply and unexpectedly was struck the first blow of the great rebellion which transformed the House.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT IS HER NAME?

MEANTIME Gilbert had recovered his portmanteau from the House and was enabled once more to put himself into the sombre habiliments which represent evening dress. A pleasing discovery awaited him: on opening the portmanteau he found that his watch and chain, his rings, his seals, his studs, the silver topped toilet things, his silver cigarette case, his gold pencil case, his ivory brushes, and all the little costly things with which a young man loves to furnish his travelling gear and himself, had vanished. Everything that could be turned into money was gone. His

purse, you remember, had already gone. He gazed at the gaps left in the portmanteau: and he laughed grimly, because he entertained no doubt at all as to the person who had conveyed away that valuable and saleable property.

'Good Heavens!' he said, in admiration. 'To him nothing is mean: nothing degrades: nothing is unworthy. He does these things and he preserves the manners of a Duke! He organizes villainous conspiracies: he invents villainous Long Firms: he concocts villainous frauds—all in the Noble, Stately, and Grand Style: and besides these schemes which mark his greatness, he does not disdain the humble practice of the area sneak. A wonderful man! A marvellous man! And to-day is Thursday: and on Saturday—we shall see—what shall we see?'

Then he remembered the message. 'What must be done shall be done, but not by your hands.'

'Why do I trust these words?' he asked himself. 'There is no reason at all: not the least reason. The thing is miraculous: it is supernatural: it haunts me: yet I trust it.'

At the customary hour he presented himself. In the middle of the room stood Cicely, receiving, with colour a little heightened, the last touch from the maid.

'I think we have done very well,' said Lady Osterley, critically superintending. 'To-morrow we must get some more things for you, my dear child, if the shops of this town are equal to the occasion.'

Gilbert stepped forward. The maid withdrew, took the pin out of her mouth, and watched his astonishment, pleased as an artist at the result of her work.

Lady Osterley stepped aside with an expectant smile. Cicely stood revealed.

'Heavens!' cried Gilbert. 'What have they done to you, Cicely?'

She was transformed: not in face, because

any change in that face would be a change for the worse; but she was glorified. She was no longer Sister Cicely of the House of Meditation, disguised with hair cut short, hanging over her ears, and in the most hideous costume possible to imagine. She was Cicely of the world: Cicely of Outside. The maid, recognising the splendid possibilities of face and figure, had kept that pin in her mouth all the afternoon while she brought to bear on the subject all the artistic feeling and craft that she possessed. The result was a really high-class work of Art. You know that artificial but extremely lovely product of the gardener's skill, the Moss rose; you also know the very humble but also lovely product of Nature, unaided, and left to the hedge and to the cold wind, the Briar rose. By what magic art can one transform the Briar rose into the Moss rose in a single afternoon? Gilbert stood staring in amazement. Then he went down on one

knee, as to a queen, and took her hand and kissed it.

'My dear,' he said, 'you are always beautiful; now, for the first time, your dress sets off your face.'

'You are satisfied, Gilbert, with our afternoon's work?' asked Lady Osterley.

Satisfied? Good Heavens! He could not reply.

Cicely stood before him blushing and confused. Yet she held her head erect, as if these fine things actually belonged to her of right, and from the beginning. She had just been brought out of the dressing-room where the maid had been shut up with her all the afternoon with this result. Her hair was dressed in something like the mode—as near as its cruel shortness permitted; she wore one of Dorabyn's own white dresses, hurriedly altered for her, all covered with beautiful lace and embroidery; there was a touch of colour at the throat.

Gilbert saw the effect, but did not ask how it was produced: her slender neck was set off with a necklace of pearls and gold: her half bare arms were adorned with two bracelets: a white flower was in her hair: she looked more dainty, more exquisitely, delicately beautiful than even Gilbert, her lover, could have imagined possible—and she stood before him blushing, smiling, pleased to please her lover, wondering why she herself was so pleased with her new finery, she who had never in her life before had dreams of dress or yearnings after lovely things. Can you imagine, my dear young lady, the existence of a girl with no dreams of dress?

'Cicely,' said Gilbert, taking her hand, 'Dorabyn will make you as queenly as herself.'

The maid retired, well pleased with this homage to her powers. She knew, of course, to whom the credit was due; this assurance is too often the only reward of the artistic

lady's-maid. 'As for her dress when she came'—this was what she told the nurse—'I assure you that I was ashamed—ashamed to look at it—I wouldn't dress a scullery maid so: and for a young lady—but there! I suppose they're just carried away with fads and fancies! I blushed; I really did: it was almost improper. Boots like a ploughboy's; stockings of wool; frock just a common serge: her hair short—the most beautiful soft and silky hair you ever saw, cut round her ears. Oh! I could have sat down and cried to see the Lord's gifts and graces thrown away in such a manner. Well, my dear, I know a figure when I see one—there's not too many good figures to be found. My lady herself hasn't got a finer figure than Miss Cicely. All the afternoon I've been over the job. Now she's dressed like a countess. When you take in the boy for good-night, look at her—you may well look at her, for you won't find a lovelier

young lady anywhere. Lovely? She's like an angel in Heaven now she's dressed! And in white, like an angel!'

'Fine feathers,' said the nurse, 'make fine birds. Not but what my lady has got a figure.'

'Well, you look at the young lady. I suppose she *is* a lady born, otherwise Mr. Gilbert wouldn't have fallen in love with her. And my lady wouldn't otherwise take her in, even to oblige Mr. Gilbert. She'll make a lovely bride.'

'What's her name?' asked the nurse.

'I don't know. My lady only called her Cicely. And I called her Miss Cicely.'

The same question occurred to Lady Osterley. What was her name? You can get along very well with a girl in domestic matters even if you know only her Christian name, but for external affairs it is really necessary to know her surname.

It was close upon dinner-time. Mr. Annandale would probably dine with them, and Lady Osterley suddenly remembered that there must be a little ceremony of introduction.

'Before we go down, Gilbert, there is one thing—how could we forget it?—you have not told me Cicely's name.'

'Cicely's name? Did I forget to tell you Cicely's name? Why—I don't know her name. What is it, Cicely? Now I come to think about it, Dorabyn, she hasn't got any name.'

'Nonsense. She must have a name. Everybody has a name.'

'Cicely hasn't, then. She's the only person in the world who hasn't got a name. You see, she was born in the House; we all have Christian names only in the Community; we leave our surnames behind us when we leave the world. I have, in fact, already forgotten my own. Cicely never left

the world, because this is the first time she has ever entered the world. You have no name, have you, Cicely?'

'I have never known any other name than Cicely.'

'Well—but what was your father's name?' asked Lady Osterley.

Cicely shook her head gravely.

'He never told me. I did not know that he had a name. In the House he was Brother Raymond.'

'Oh! but this is absurd. We can't introduce you about as Cicely, daughter of Brother Raymond, can we? Don't you really know your own father's name, my dear?'

Cicely shook her head again. She really did not know this elementary fact.

And then there happened a most wonderful thing: one of the things that are improbable in the highest degree: a thing so strange that Gilbert now believes it to be one link in a chain of events specially brought about by

the Intelligence — the Soul — the Unseen Personality—which sent him the message so full of hope and reassurance. Well, you shall hear what happened.

'My father never told me his name,' Cicely repeated. 'He left his name behind him, I suppose, when he came over from England. All the members of the House leave their Past behind them, names and all, when they come in. I should have done so, but I have no Past to leave—and no name.'

'She is the daughter of the House, Dorabyn, I told you. Her mother died at her birth.'

'Poor girl! But what are we to do? Shall we invent a name for her—just for a little while, Gilbert, until——'

Gilbert's eyes fell on the desk which he had carried away from the House. 'You have told me that you have some papers here, Cicely,' he said, laying his hand upon it. 'Do you think they might throw some

light upon this vanished Past? It may become important to find out not only your name, but your people at home. Do you think you could search the papers for some clue to your own belongings?'

Cicely opened the desk. 'I have not looked into it,' she said, 'for some years—for a long time. Here are some letters'—she took out a bundle—'letters which my father wrote to my mother before they were married—and some written by her to him. He treasured them, and so I have always kept them.'

She took them out of the desk, and laid them on the table. 'Here is a book of drawings and paintings—my mother's book: here is a book full of verse which my mother wrote: here is a book of music which I think was written by my mother.'

'Will you look at your father's letters, Cicely?'

She untied the string and took out the

letters. They were written in a handwriting most artistic, every letter being beautifully formed and finished as if it was an artistic effort of the greatest importance. But there was no signature except a single letter—'R.'

'I can find no name,' said Cicely. 'Will you look?'

'It seems like sacrilege to look at a dead man's letters—and his love letters. But the occasion justifies us, perhaps.'

Lady Osterley glanced at the letters. They were all written in the year 1873, and there were about twenty of them in all. 'They do not tell us,' said Lady Osterley, 'what we want to know. But they are very remarkable letters. Cicely, your father must have been a man of great elevation and some enthusiasm. These are the letters of a prophet, or a visionary. Was he a dreamer of dreams?'

'He belonged to the next world,' Cicely replied gravely, 'before he was permitted to go there.'

'They are all addressed "Dearest Alice"; and they are signed "R.," and nothing more. Let us see what else you have, Cicely.'

'Here is my mother's book of verses.'

Lady Osterley turned over the pages. 'Why,' she said, 'I have seen some of these verses. Where? I seem to know them. They are verses of aspiration. Your father, Cicely, seems to have been equally mated. Oh! but these are beautiful verses; they ought to be published. We must read in this book again, Cicely. Meantime there is no name or signature.'

'This is her book of paintings.'

They were water colours, representing angels singing in a divine rapture; souls borne upwards; souls reaching down to help those still in earthly bonds; Heavenly messengers flying from world to world; the lifting of the soul from the lowest depths.

'Cicely,' said Lady Osterley, 'it fills one with a kind of shame to feel how low one is

lying. We must study this book again. Meantime, no name—no signature.'

It was the same with the book of music—no name.

'Here, then,' said Cicely, 'are two portraits taken when they were young—before they married, before they left England: the only pictures I have of them.'

Cicely took them out. They were cabinet photographs. One of them represented a young man with a high square forehead and limpid eyes—the forehead and eyes of an enthusiast—exactly the same forehead and the same kind of dreamy eyes that the Master had. His face was extremely handsome, but not strong: there was no fight in it: but there was the possibility of every Christian virtue — obedience, discipline, patience, faith, hope, and visions — yes, visions in plenty.

'A strange and beautiful face,' said Dorabyn, taking up the portraits. 'This

other is your mother, I suppose. Why—I seem to know that face. Surely I know that face.' This too was the face of one who might become a visionary: Cicely resembled her mother in the sweetness of her face; in the purity of her face; in the seriousness of her face; she lacked, however, the mysterious depths that lay in her mother's eyes, which were like wells of light and faith. 'You curiously resemble her, Cicely—oh! you are so very much like her. But—but—but where have I seen this face? Where have I seen this face?'

She turned the portrait to the light and looked at it with a kind of bewilderment. 'I know the face,' she said. 'I am certain that I know the face. I have seen her somewhere. Where have I seen her?'

She handed it to Gilbert.

'It reminds me of someone,' he said. 'Like you, Dorabyn, I know the face. Whose is it?'

Just then the nurse brought in the boy to say good-night. Gilbert looked up and caught the child's face as he held it up for his mother to kiss.

'Why, Dorabyn, it is like the boy. Look at it.'

She looked from boy to picture and from picture to boy. 'It *is* like him,' she said. 'It is strangely like him. Good-night, my son, good-night. Is it coincidence, Gilbert?'

'Good Heavens!' he cried. 'It is like—oh! is it possible that I did not see it at once? And Cicely, too! Why, it is like her, too—it is stamped all over her face. Can't you see it, Dorabyn? Are we dreaming? Are we in a world of shadows? She must have been some close relation.'

These were incoherent words. He stopped and replaced the photograph in Dorabyn's hands. 'Is it possible?' he murmured. 'Does it still escape you? Cannot you see the resemblance?' And he turned away his

face. For the person resembled was nothing less than Lady Osterley's husband, the man who had brought about all their misery.

The man's wife laid the picture, face downward, on the table. 'I see the likeness,' she said in a hard voice.

Cicely looked from one to the other: Gilbert stood with guilty, hanging head, and face averted. Lady Osterley sat with contracted brow, and eyes in which nothing could be discerned but wrath implacable. Then Cicely's eyes grew large and full of light and gazed afar off.

'Oh!' she cried, returning, 'you must not: you must not. My mother says that you must not. "Forgive—forgive—forgive—now, if ever."'

'Child!' said her new friend, 'what do you mean? Your mother? Where is she?'

'She is dead. But I can go to her when I please. She says, "Forgive—forgive—forgive."'

'You don't understand, Dorabyn,' said Gilbert. 'The House is a House of spiritual connections and strange experiences. When Cicely tells you what her mother says, you may understand that her mother does say so.'

'I understand nothing, Gilbert—neither you, nor this child—nothing, except the likeness—and that I know now whose the portrait is.'

'Who is it?'

'Cicely's mother was that man's sister.'

Lady Osterley turned to Cicely. 'Your mother, my dear. I met her once only, many years ago, when I was a child. I knew—other members of her family more intimately, when I grew up. Your mother was the eldest of her family. It is strange! It is strange!'

'Oh! You knew my mother. Then listen when she says, "Forgive, forgive."'

Lady Osterley drew her closer, and kissed her on the forehead. 'Child!' she said,

'may you never learn how hard it is to forgive! There are some things which—pray, my dear, that you may never encounter such things. Let me look at one or two of her letters. Let me only look at their signature.'

Cicely gave her the bundle of letters tied up with ribbon. Lady Osterley turned to the end of the first letter and read the signature, which she showed to Gilbert.

'Is it not most strange?' she asked.

'It is more strange than you think. If you knew all——' but he stopped.

'Cicely'—Lady Osterley took her hands and held them closely—'you are the daughter of Alice Osterley, the sister of my husband. He was six years her junior.'

'Is my name Osterley, too?'

'No—no. Oh! I remember now. She married a man named Raymond Moulton: I have heard of it since, from her sister. He was a man with strange opinions—poetical and visionary. But he made her

believe whatever he believed. Indeed, I think she was ready to believe everything that was saintly. They were married, and he gave away all his money and took his wife to America, and to this day no one knows what became of them. They came here, then. Strange, Cicely, that I should come across her daughter here! There was a preacher or minister of some kind who went away with them: he had been a Baptist, I believe; or a Bible Christian; or something humble: but he preferred to create a little revelation for himself. I have heard them talk about him, as well. They said he was a man of no education, but with gifts and graces: he had eloquence: he could move people; and he had a most splendid voice. Oh! it is all so wonderful! And you are her daughter—Alice's daughter—my husband's niece!'

'He has the splendid voice still,' said Gilbert. 'But—if you only knew all!'

'My dear,' Lady Osterley went on, 'your mother, whom you so much resemble, was the most saintly woman in the whole wide world. She was a miracle of holiness and sweetness. She lived far above everybody else. In the Catholic Church they would have canonized her. She had the most exquisite dreams and visions: she put them into poetry: she put them into pictures: she sang them and she painted them. It is so strange—oh! so strange—that I should have come here to meet her daughter!' She kept on repeating the words: 'The strangeness of it!'

'Yes,' said Gilbert again; 'and far, far stranger than you know.'

She paid no heed to these words, though they, too, were a repetition.

'You are my niece, child: my boy's first cousin. You must love me and your cousin, too.' She kissed the girl again, but with a little shudder, because the shadow of her

husband stood between them. 'It is so strange!' she repeated; 'so very strange and wonderful! Yes—you have your mother's face—that sweet and serious face. My husband had the features—but there were reasons—yes, good reasons—why he could not have that face.'

'This precious desk!' said Gilbert. 'How lucky that we brought it along! Cicely Moulton—Moulton—Miss Moulton—do you like your new name just to wear for a little interval?'

'I like to think that I have a friend who knew my mother,' Cicely replied. 'What does it matter about a name?'

'Oh! I wish I had known all this before,' said Gilbert; 'and the likeness is so wonderful! I ought to have guessed it. Yet—likeness in unlikeness.'

'Only the lines of the face are like his, Gilbert. Let us abide by the unlikeness.'

'Yes—yet—if you only knew. However

—you are Lady Osterley's niece, Cicely—only you must call her Dorabyn, because that is her name. And her boy is your cousin—and we will take you to England and find you plenty of cousins in addition—some of them most eligible cousins.'

'You must not wait for me if you are going in search of cousins, Cicely, because I shall not return to England for a long time.'

'My dear Dorabyn'—what did Gilbert mean? And why did he look so strangely serious? 'To-day is Thursday. On Sunday—next Sunday—we shall leave this town and go to New York. On Monday or Tuesday we shall leave New York by the first steamer that sails. And a week later, Dorabyn, or eight days at the most, you shall be in your own country house, or in your own town house—which you choose.'

'You are for the moment deranged by your new happiness, my dear Gilbert. What does this mean?'

'I have, I assure you, this information on the very best possible authority. Cicely, in fact, gave it to me—by order of her mother.'

He spoke quite gravely and seriously.

'I do not pretend to understand you, Gilbert.'

'I do not pretend to understand myself; all I know is that Cicely, child of your sister-in-law, is here, unknown to you or anyone else: that I have been brought here: that you have been brought here: that you have been able to discover this dear girl's parentage: and that—there are other things.'

'Yes, I can see that there are other things. Well—I can wait. Come now, we must go to dinner. Mr. Annandale will be waiting for us.'

She was wrong. Mr. Annandale was not waiting for them. He was not there at all. They dined without him, a silent party, pleased to be silent. After dinner they sat on the balcony which overlooked the street.

It was the first time that Cicely had seen a street. It was a hot, still night and the street was crowded with people strolling up and down. The city of Aldermanbury contains eighty thousand people, of whom fifteen thousand are working girls. Obviously, therefore, the majority of the passengers were working girls taking the air after work: they walked arm in arm, two or three abreast: they chattered gaily: they looked happy. The young man was conspicuous by his absence. Where is the young man of Aldermanbury? He is away. He is out West. The girls do the work that he should have done. Therefore they get no love, and have neither husband nor children. Whereby the good old American stock is dying out, and there are grave doubts whether the great Cosmopolitan Blend—of German, Irish, Scandinavian, Italian, Russian, Polish, French blood—will possess virtues of its own sufficient to compensate for its loss.

'How they talk!' said Cicely, excited and interested. 'How they laugh! Oh! how pretty it is! Are they all wicked, Gilbert?'

'All alike, Cicely; desperately wicked. They like pretty things to put on—you understand that wickedness, don't you? And they like to talk about anything—you understand that temptation, too—and they would all of them—or nearly all—like someone to love them—you understand that form of wickedness, don't you?'

'You mean that they are not wicked at all, Gilbert.'

'Not a bit more than the people you have left behind. Rules cannot make people better.'

Cicely was silent, still gazing at the crowd below.

'They are all alone in space,' she murmured. 'The Master said so. All these people are alone, and they are all going up or down.'

'They are not quite alone. They are hand in hand. They go up or down together. You

must not think so much of the going up or down, dear Cicely. You are in the world which has many interests of the day; so many that very few of us ever ask whether we are going up or down.'

'But we must. The Master says that there is nothing else.'

'Since he has cut you off from everything, he is right, I suppose. Certainly at the House it was much more wholesome for you to consider yourself than the people round you.'

'Tell me, Cicely,' said Lady Osterley, 'something more about your parents. Your mother died and you never saw her?'

'Oh, yes! I see her every day.'

'You think you do—yes—you think about her.'

'My father talked about her every day: he kept the place where she is buried covered with flowers: the place is in the coppice at the end of the lawn: between a lime tree and a maple. You know it, Gilbert?'

'Yes, Cicely, I know it well.'

'Brother Charles—who is a bad man—sits every afternoon on the bench there. Even the flowers droop when he sits there. But only her dust lies there. She herself is in a better world, and my father with her. They were never parted. Every day he went away to talk with her: every day she called him. Now they are both together, they do not forget me. Every day they call me.'

'Dear child, I understand nothing.'

For her face was full of light, as of one who looks upon a distant splendour. Lady Osterley looked and wondered, and shivered.

'I will tell her—I will ask her to make you understand. Something is to be done; and it is all in her hands: I know it is. Hush! she calls me!' Cicely sprang to her feet and listened. 'Hush! she calls me! I must be alone with her.' She walked out of the room, and shut her own door.

'What does she mean, Gilbert?' asked

Lady Osterley. 'What does it all mean? What do you mean by what you kept saying about things being stranger still?'

'My dear Dorabyn, I am not mad. I am quite certain that my dear Cicely is not mad. But I do know that she has trances: in her trances she thinks that she is in communication with her mother. The Master—the Leader in the Community of Cranks, the Crankiest of all—has similar illusions, if they are illusions; Cicely's father had the same illusions. Cicely brings me messages which she cannot understand; but I can. Laugh at me, if you please. But, Dorabyn, I cannot choose but believe.'

'You, Gilbert, to believe in trances and spiritualism?'

'This is not stupid spiritualism. There are no pretences here. It is very certain to me that this girl communicates with her dead mother. Sometimes she remembers what her mother tells her—that is when the words

concern herself: sometimes she forgets when she has uttered them. That is when the words are a message. I have received several messages from her mother in this way.'

'You, Gilbert? You? Messages from Alice?'

'As you say: from Alice. From that lofty and saintly soul who was allowed to remain on earth no longer than to give birth to Cicely. Then she went away. But still—Dorabyn, listen very seriously. It is Alice who is guiding things. She brought me here. She brought you here. She made me bring Cicely here. And, believe me, there are other things, greater things still, which she will accomplish for her daughter—and her sister-in-law.'

The time had been when words such as these from Gilbert would have been a mockery, or a parody. In fact, they would have been impossible. Lady Osterley listened

with wonder and with that mixture of eagerness and doubt which falls upon one when the veil seems lifted if only a little.

'Come, Dorabyn,' Gilbert went on; 'Cicely has gone into her own room in order to fall into trance. If you are curious, you can go and look—you need not be afraid. Nothing could wake her, if it be as I think.'

Dorabyn opened the door. She came back in a moment, terrified.

'Gilbert! Come. It is dreadful. She is lying on the couch rigid, in a kind of catalepsy.'

Gilbert followed her. They stood over the unconscious girl.

'Do not be afraid,' he said. 'She will return presently. Is she not beautiful, Dorabyn?'

'She is very beautiful. Her beauty is ethereal, like her mother's.'

'Dorabyn, you remember those days when you used to write me long letters? Well,

out of those letters there grew up in my mind an ideal woman. Not you, but like you. We could never have loved in that way. But she was like you—as noble—as——'

'Noble, Gilbert? And I married—for ambition, because I would be the wife of a great statesman—that man!'

'As good and as generous and as sweet, Dorabyn. And the ideal woman—is Cicely.'

He stooped and kissed her cold, white forehead; and his voice dropped, and his eyes grew humid.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

The English traveller, Mr. Annandale, was one of that large class of moderns who spend a great part of their lives in travelling. They do not make voyages to Spitzbergen, nor do they explore Patagonia ; nor are they found on the steppes of Siberia. Their travels are never beyond the modern hotel with its little comforts ; they cease to journey where claret and champagne cease to be accessible : they look about for each other wherever they go. And they always find each other. Their knowledge of the world is limited to Clubland, which, although it is

universal, is limited as to population. 'I never go anywhere,' said Mr. Annandale, 'without meeting someone I know.' The unexpected meeting and the unexpected greeting made up for this traveller the whole joy of strange lands.

It was a most amazing circumstance, had they reflected upon it, that Mr. Annandale did not appear at dinner. Never before had he been known to break such an engagement. What had happened? But there were other things to engage their attention and his defection passed almost unnoticed.

In the morning he appeared at breakfast. He looked embarrassed, a thing quite unusual in this man of the world. But there are things which may surprise even the most experienced man of the world.

'Why did you not dine with me yesterday?' Lady Osterley asked.

'I was—I was out on a drive and—in fact—I was unable to get back in time. I am

really very sorry. I can only hope that you did not wait.'

'Not long. But let me introduce you to my niece, Miss Cicely Moulton. She is a niece of romance, only just discovered: a long lost niece: in fact, I think you may have known her mother, Mr. Annandale. She was my husband's sister, Alice, who married a man named Moulton.'

'Your husband's sister, Alice, who married Raymond Moulton? Really?'

'Alice died in a House or Monastery near here.' Mr. Annandale started. 'Cicely has been all her life a resident of the place—what is the matter, Mr. Annandale?' For the veteran who ought to have been equal to any kind of unexpectedness looked bewildered to an extent incapable of concealment.

'Nothing—only—in a House or Monastery near here? Is it a certain place called the House of Meditation?'

'That, I believe, is its name. Cicely only left it yesterday.'

'Only left it yesterday?' he repeated. 'Only yesterday? Why—I was over there yesterday. Then, of course, she knows—she knows all the people there——'

'Oh yes,' said Cicely. 'I know all the Brothers and Sisters.'

'All?' Mr. Annandale's face expressed more bewilderment.

'The House,' Lady Osterley went on, 'is, I understand, an embodiment of Raymond Moulton's dreams — equality, brotherhood, work, and meditation. He died there some years after his wife. Gilbert found Cicely there, an orphan.'

'Oh!' he repeated stupidly. 'Gilbert found her there! Oh! Gilbert found her there!'

'Yes, and brought her to me. She will not go back again, I believe.'

'No,' said Gilbert, 'she will not go back.'

'I understand. Quite so. Gilbert goes back though, I suppose?'

'I think not.'

'Then how?—I mean, why?' And here he stopped, and said nothing more.

Breakfast over, Gilbert and Cicely rose.

'Stay a moment, Lady Osterley,' said Mr. Annandale. 'I have something to tell you.'

'I perceive, in fact, my friend, that you have something on your mind.'

'It is this.' He dropped his voice mysteriously, because there were other people in the room. 'Yesterday afternoon I drove over to see this House or Community, or whatever you call it. I was curious to see what kind of place that was whose attractions were strong enough to convert Gilbert into a Brother and a costermonger. Of course, I supposed there was a woman. So there was. And yet——' He stopped abruptly.

'Yes? I was thinking of going over there myself. Did you find the place interesting?'

He looked at her in obvious expectancy. He observed no signs of any interest out of

the ordinary in this communication of his. He cleared his throat, and proceeded to reveal all he had to tell.

'And there, Lady Osterley—I think I ought to tell you—in fact, I must tell you—I had no suspicion or thought of the thing, I assure you—God forbid that I should go about prying—but there—quite accidentally, I say—I discovered your great secret.'

'My great secret, Mr. Annandale?'

Why, thought the man, should she go on to pretend surprise?

'Your secret. I discovered the one cardinal fact which explains all.'

'Mr. Annandale, will you please explain your explanation?'

'I will, if you wish it. I thought you would rather——'

'Still, if you will, kindly. We cannot be too explicit when we come to discovering secrets.'

'Well, of course you must be well aware

of the way in which people talk about your silence and your husband's whereabouts. He must be alive, they say, because no announcement of his death has ever been made. Where is he, then? Where is Lady Osterley? She is reported as having been seen here and there. Why does she write to no one? Why is it that even her husband's friends cannot hear of his place of residence? That is what they say.'

'It is. I know all that perfectly well.'

'I can go home, if you permit me, with a complete answer to all these questions. I can say'—Lady Osterley took up her fan—'I can say—if you authorize me—that I have seen him. He lives in a Community. He is a crank, like his sister and his brother-in-law. He has gone to the Community which they founded. He has been converted to their crankiness. He is quite mad—and there he lives.'

Lady Osterley made no reply. She held

the fan before her face to hide the change of colour and her startled look. Of all things in the world she least expected this. That her husband should become a gambler by profession : that he should go down in the world : this would not surprise her : that he should become capable of any depths would not surprise her. But that he should have become a religious crank—what *could* it mean ?

Mr. Annandale went on : ' And now, of course, I understand why Gilbert is there, too.'

Lady Osterley shivered : for she understood, too, why Gilbert was there. ' I will set you free '—she remembered the words. How was she to be set free ? She understood, too, what those words meant. There was but one way of freedom for her.

' Gilbert,' this intelligent person continued, ' is one of your oldest friends : you have sent him to look after your husband. He belongs to the Community in order to be with him

and to watch over him. I declare, Lady Osterley, that I have never known a case of truer friendship than this of Gilbert's. When I understood what it meant, and thought of him selling strawberries in the street—out of a basket, mind you—I thought I was going to cry. I did, indeed. Gilbert, you know! I was never so amazed in all my life,' Mr. Annandale went on. 'I saw your husband sitting in the shade under some trees. I was so astonished that I did not believe my own senses. I asked one of the people who the man was. He told me it was Brother Charles—Brother Charles—Brother Charles—Brother! Think of Sir Charles Osterley being a Brother! Sir Charles Osterley—the proudest man in the whole world!'

Lady Osterley put down her fan and drank a little iced water.

'You say that you saw—with your own eyes — my husband — Sir Charles — my husband—in the House?'

'I did. And then, I say, I understood all. I called out to him. "You here, Sir Charles?" I cried. He wouldn't answer. Oh! he is stark, staring mad! He lifted his head and recognised me. I saw that he recognised me. But he wouldn't speak to me. He got up and walked away. I suppose he does not wish to see any of his old friends. He looks just the same — tall, austere, a devil of a fellow with his religious exercises, I should say—looks as if he wore a hair-shirt: the same old poker down his back—I beg your pardon, Lady Osterley. His face is changed, though. I thought he looked savage—perhaps because I disturbed him. I wonder what made him take up this particular craze? Why did he go into the House of Meditation? I suppose because his sister was there before him.'

'Indeed, Mr. Annandale, there are so many strange things happening——'

'And you may understand my surprise

this morning when you told me that this girl was his own niece—as like him as a girl can be to a man! And you say they were together in this House. Good Heavens! Fancy your finding your niece in the same House as your husband!'

'But they did not know the relationship. Cicely did not even know her own name.'

'And Gilbert came to look after him. Went so far as to sell strawberries along the street in a basket—carried a basket! Did it very well, too.'

'Mr. Annandale.' She had now entirely recovered her self-possession, and she went on acting her part. She sat up, laid aside the fan, and placed her hand upon his. 'Since you know so much, my friend, learn a little more. Gilbert has been in search of my husband for two years. The reason of my long silence was that I really did not know where he was. As for the reasons that brought him to the House of Medita-

tion, I confess that I do not know them. Perhaps, as you suppose, he was influenced by his sister's example. Nor can I even guess what he hopes to find in the place, or how long he will stay there.'

'Is he, then, so hopelessly mad?'

'Hopelessly, I fear. There seems no hope at all for his kind of madness. And now, Mr. Annandale, for the next thing, please, for the moment, keep my secret to yourself. I do not wish his people, if I can help it, to learn anything about his mental condition. If it should happen that he is really settled down into a harmless visionary condition, I will tell them. Meanwhile, do not speak to anyone of what you have seen.'

'You have come here, of course, in order to see him?'

She answered this very direct question evasively.

'I am going over this morning—immediately. Thank you for telling me—what

you discovered—Mr. Annandale, and—if you please, do not again attempt to speak to him. You might waken old memories.'

'Poor Charles! What a change! What a break up! And when one thinks——'

Lady Osterley left him thinking. She had plenty to think about by herself. Her husband in this very place! And Gilbert with him! What was Gilbert doing? Looking after a madman? Had her husband really become an Enthusiast? Was he mad? Why was Gilbert here? Then, once more, the words of Gilbert echoed in her brain. She remembered them. 'I will set you free.' He was there in order to set her free. How? She trembled. The only way of freedom was, for one or the other, for the broken gamester, or for herself, to pass through the Gate of Death. One of the two must die for the freedom of the other. One must die. Gilbert would set her free. How? A mist rose before her

eyes: a horrible deadly sickness seized her. Alone in her bedroom she sank into a chair and lost consciousness.

She came to herself after a little. Then—it was wonderful how, one after the other, the feeling of guidance by the dead hand seized and held each of them in turn—she looked up, and she whispered, 'Alice! Alice! If you can hear me, listen. If you can help us in this fearful trouble, help us now. It is your own daughter you must help: it is your own brother: it is your brother's wife: it is your brother's son: it is your daughter's lover. Alice, if you *can* hear me, as your daughter believes, tell me what to do.'

A man of science once developed a theory that prayer is often a great help to the man who prays, because it leads him, in some quite scientific way, to a clearer understanding of the situation, and of the right proportion of the events which lead up to it and affect its composition. This, he main-

tained, was the true function of prayer, and the only answer that ever comes to it. I give his opinion for what it is worth, and to enable those who agree with him to explain all that has gone before and all that follows. No answer came in words to the prayer: but Lady Osterley rose from her chair with decision in her mind. She felt no longer any hesitation nor any doubt.

She opened the door of her room. In one of the two sitting-rooms Gilbert and Cicely sat laughing and love-making, as happy as two young lovers can hope to be. How could Gilbert laugh and talk so light of heart if his purpose was—that way?

In the other room, all the doors were wide open; her boy was careering about the room, shouting and laughing. He should never know: he must never know.

She shut her door again: they should not be disturbed. She rang the bell, told her maid that she was going for a drive for

an hour or two, put on her hat and went downstairs.

She understood now what Gilbert meant by hinting at other things. If it was strange that Gilbert and she herself, and Cicely, her niece, should all be brought together in the place where Alice died, it was still more strange that her husband, too, should be brought here. By this time she began to believe, as Gilbert himself believed, that they were brought here by one hand and for one purpose : it was the dead hand of Alice that brought them here, and the dead hand was to do more for them. What more ?

It was about eleven in the forenoon when the carriage drove up at the porch and verandah of the House. Lady Osterley got down and told the driver to wait. No one was in the verandah : she looked in at the open door and saw a great, bare, ugly room with a permanent fragrance of fried steak, mingled with that of pork and beans, hanging

about the place. At the head of the central table sat an old man, a venerable old man. He looked like one who was already dead: his hands were folded: his head was leaning back: his eyes were open. He, like Cicely, the evening before, was in a trance. Dorabyn shuddered, and went out into the open air.

There were sounds of work: an engine of some kind was throbbing and panting not far off: there was the thumping and beating, the stumping about, the murmur and humming and echoing which belong to work of all kinds: before the House, and on either side of it, were gardens, kitchen-gardens, market-gardens, melon-patches, tomato-fields, vineyards, orchards: and about the garden were men at work, very leisurely work it seemed. At the end of the garden was a belt of wood.

'He was under the shade of the trees,' said Lady Osterley. She walked across the lawn and reached the coppice.

Yes. There, alone on a bench, his elbow on the arm: his chin in his hand: his hat beside him: sat her husband, the man who had done all the mischief. As he sat there, in deep shade, with the pallor of his face, and the austerity of his brow, he looked like an ideal preacher or theologian: he might have sat for the portrait of the most uncompromising Puritan or Calvinistic Divider of the word: some Hammer of Heresy. Yet there was no change in him. Such he looked when she married him: so he looked in the House: thus he commanded the respect of the world, but never its affection.

As the wife gazed upon him, she remembered the days, not so long past, when she awaited his coming, the visits of the frigid lover, with a kind of awe: when, with the same pale cheek and cold eye, he seemed to her more than a man in his wisdom and his austerity and his freedom from the common weaknesses. She remembered how nothing

moved him: not injustice and wrong—they were things which had to be removed out of the way: not ambition even—high place—the highest—was the certain end for such a man. Not any kind of sport, game, recreation: not desire for literary fame: not any endeavour to move the populace; if plain, cold reason would not succeed, rhetoric should not. She saw in him a strong, able, cold man, one who never swerved from his high purpose, never lost his temper, and was a hero even to his valet. That time returned to her. And while she stood and looked upon him, she remembered the awakening: the sacrifice of half her fortune: her discovery of the truth: the sudden, tragic end of that Act.

No change? Yes. Suddenly some thought crossed his mind. His face lost its austerity: it clouded over: the pallor remained, but it only brightened the terrible change that came upon him and revealed the devil within him.

He sat up: he looked about him with sudden surprise: his face before had been hidden with a mask. Now, it was full of evil thoughts and evil memories: it was natural.

'He has gone down—down—deeper than I thought,' said his wife.

She stepped forward. He knew the footstep—turned his head and recognised her. Then he rose and bowed gravely, as if receiving a visitor, with the same calm and indifference with which he had treated Gilbert.

'Lady Osterley?' he asked, showing in his voice no sign of any emotion whatever.

'I heard by accident, Sir Charles, that you were here. Mr. Annandale, whom you may remember—formerly an acquaintance of yours—saw you here and told me of your presence here. A strange place, but you have your reasons, no doubt.'

'Annandale? Why not say at once that

it was Mr. Gilbert Maryon who brought you here?'

'Gilbert had not given me to understand that you were here. He does not know, as yet, that I have heard of your residence here. It is entirely by accident that I am at Aldermanbury.'

'Then he did not tell you why I am here?'

'Certainly not. I have come partly to ask that question, if you choose to answer it. This is a very strange place for you to select as a home. There are other things I want to ask you—always supposing that you will answer these questions.'

'Will you sit down while you are asking these questions? You must allow me to exercise my own judgment as to answering any question.'

'Thank you, I will stand. Answer or not, as you please.'

'Then you will allow me? Thank you.

The morning is hot. I will sit down. Now, Lady Osterley, if you please we will take your questions.' Again, as with Gilbert, the reverse of the true situation: the appearance of the Judge examining the accused.

'My position you will understand — to begin with—when I tell you that I have resolved on enduring banishment for life or anything else provided that I can save my son from the knowledge of his father's life. I have come abroad so that I may not be asked questions about you. I shall stay abroad so long as anybody remains who would be likely to inquire after you. You have been recognised here by an old acquaintance. I do not suppose that he will keep the secret, although I have asked him to do so. Such things as these get about. It will become known, sooner or later, that you are here. Your mother and sister, if they hear of your place of residence, will

certainly come out to see you. They are continually imploring me to tell them where you are and how you are.'

'Please go on.'

'Do you wish them to see you?'

'I wish nothing; that is, I suppose that I am not anxious to see them.'

'Tell me, if you can, why you are here. I cannot believe it possible that you should be touched with the spirit of this Community, which is, I believe, one of religious Visionaries.'

'There is no reason why I should pretend —to you. Of course I am not touched by their religious nonsense. I came here because it is a convenient place for me. I have no money, to begin with. In this place, which is detestable in other respects, one wants no money. If you have any money with you, give it to me.'

'Do you mean to stay here long?'

She evaded the question about money.

'They are going to turn me out. I leave the place to-morrow.'

'Where are you going, and what will you do?'

'I have no money. Therefore, of course, I do not know. I must be guided by what happens. Nobody knows what may happen.'

She drew out her purse, in which there was a roll of notes. She laid the roll on the bench beside him.

'There is some money to go on with. Two or three hundred dollars. Now, what shall you do?'

'I must get somewhere — out of this country—to Canada, I suppose. Perhaps it will be safer there.'

'Safer?'

'Yes. Safer. You don't know, perhaps, what that means. I will tell you, briefly. He turned round on the seat and faced her—with the face of an evil spirit. 'I will tell

you. It means that when a man is left without money he must devise some way of getting money. Do you see? He wants money to buy food, and he wants money to play with. How can a man play if he has no money? Without play one may as well be dead.' He took up the bundle of notes and counted them. 'One hundred—two hundred—three hundred and fifty dollars. I dare say I shall play a little with some of this—— Well, Lady Osterley, this necessity of getting money is one that has probably never struck you. To get money means to make somebody provide the money. There are many ways: some that society recognises —some that society does not. They all mean robbing your neighbour. I have been, like everybody else, preying on my neighbour: eating up the ignorant and deceiving the credulous. Now you begin to understand.'

'You mean that you are, in consequence,

living in concealment? Be good enough to spare me details.'

'Exactly. The Law is in search of me.'

'On a charge of fraud, I suppose. Oh, my son! my son! if you should ever know!'

'There is something said about a commercial transaction in the nature of a conspiracy. All trade is fraud, to begin with. That, however, is not all.'

'Not all? Can there be anything worse?' She shuddered; then sat down on the opposite end of the long bench.

'Comparisons are deceitful: there is something, however, more dangerous. There was a gaming-house some time ago—and a little trouble arose, and some kind of fight—such things are not unusual—and next day there was a dead man found outside.'

'Oh!' Lady Osterley shivered and shook. 'You are—charged—with murder?'

'They call it murder, I believe. If they take me they will, I understand, try me for

murder. I have to leave this place, as I told you, to-morrow. If they should arrest me there will be a trial and possibly a little experiment with an electric apparatus after it.'

Lady Osterley buried her face in her hands. The thing was too dreadful for indignation ; it was too horrible for anything except blank despair.

'Oh!' she cried, springing to her feet again. 'How can you live—you—with what is behind you—and what is before you? How can you live? You ought to have killed yourself long, long ago!'

'There is a Rule in this House,' he replied, 'that we are to forget the Past. It is a Rule with which I very willingly complied. As for what is before, so long as I remain here there is nothing before. Nothing. The nothingness is intolerable. I have, in fact, sometimes considered whether it would not be better to face any dangers rather than go

on living here in the House of Nothingness. At all events the danger will now have to be faced. To-morrow at latest.'

'You will be arrested, if you are caught: you will be tried for murder: you will be tried for fraud if you are acquitted of murder.'

'That is so. Put it more clearly. Say that my description is in the hands of the police of every town. Escape is only possible by keeping to the country roads and by travelling at night. I must make either for Canada or for the West. I must get out of the country somehow.'

'Oh! Will there never be any end of all this misery and shame?'

'So far as I can tell, Lady Osterley, no end at all until the natural end. We are not, however, a long-lived race, we who live by our wits. Sometimes our wits fail us: those who drop out can never get back again: sometimes there is a quarrel and a fight. Still, if I escape this danger, I

may go on a great many years, long enough to make myself known some day, perhaps, to my son, who will be pleased, no doubt, to acknowledge his father.'

'Charles! At first I felt nothing but anger and shame Now, it is too late for either. Anger will not help, and shame I must hide. There is nothing left for you but pity—oh, the sorrow of it! That such a man as you were once could by any temptation, or any madness, be brought so low! Oh! the Pity and the Sorrow and the Shame of it! You! you! with your genius—your learning—your powers—your career stretching out clear and straight before you. Oh! Merciful God'—she threw up her arms—'do something—something—to make this man feel!'

'Heaven,' he said coldly, 'does not often, I believe, interfere in the case of a career *manqué*.'

'Charles, I am certain—I am quite certain

—that something terrible will happen, and that immediately. It has been arranged: we are all brought together for that purpose.'

'I think not, Lady Osterley. Thanks to you, I now have some money. I shall get away by night quietly. You will often hear of, or from me, in the years to come.'

Her eyes fell upon a place all covered with summer flowers, beyond the bench on which her husband was sitting. At first it looked like a garden bed of flowers—a long narrow bed: but as she looked she saw that it was raised in the middle: it became a grave: she remembered what Cicely said: 'My mother was buried in the coppice at the end of the lawn: there was a flower-bed to mark her grave. Brother Charles, who was a bad man'—how did the girl know that he was a bad man?—'sat on the bench beside the grave and made the flowers wither by reason of his extreme badness.' Her mother held everything in her own hands: she guided

all : something was going to happen that Alice would bring about. All this flashed across her mind in a moment.

'Charles!' she cried passionately, 'if this could move you—if anything could move *you*—who brought you to this place?'

'I heard about it from some paper.'

'Who brought you here?' she repeated. 'Who brought me here? In this House your sister Alice died'—the man started. 'In this House she is buried. Under the shade of the trees in this little wood she lies buried—at your very feet—your sister Alice—most saintly of women. She lies buried beneath those flowers.'

'My sister Alice? She died here?' The man was moved in spite of himself. The presence of Alice in this place, with him—there are some things too startling for even the most callous.

'In this House her child was born—the girl Cicely.'

'The girl Cicely is her daughter? Alice's daughter?'

He quickly recovered his emotion, and was now only curious.

'Is it accidental—think you—that we should all be brought together in this strange manner?'

'You mean that my sister Alice, being dead and buried, has been exerting her influence to bring about this agreeable reunion of friends and relations? Pardon me, Lady Osterley, I cannot follow you in this belief. The dead sleep well. They know nothing; they care nothing; they can do nothing.'

'Cannot even the memory of Alice move you?'

'What is the good of being moved by her memory? Why do you want me to be moved? I should be no better off by being moved. Am I to shed a tear over the memory of Alice? Will any such emotion make my escape the easier?'

'She has sent you messages, through her daughter.'

'Messages? Oh, you mean the foolishness with which the girl has been pestering me. She believes in the rubbish they pretend here. She is hysterical and thinks she has visions. Messages she brought me. Oh yes. I was to repent, I believe. She has threatened me, if I remember rightly. Do you really mean, Lady Osterley—do you wish me to believe—that Alice—who is dead and dust—sent me these messages?'

'They were her messages. I cannot choose but believe that they were messages. Since I have heard—— '

'The girl is like her mother,' he went on. 'I ought to have perceived the likeness. But the dress reduces all the women here to hideousness. Still, I wonder that I did not observe the likeness. It is, I confess, somewhat bizarre that we should be all gathered together in this queer place: but

to-morrow I am to go. So, you see, it all amounts to nothing, unless Alice has arranged that you shall witness my arrest, which will very likely take place to-morrow. It would be a delicate and thoughtful attention on the part of Alice. Not the kind of thing one would always expect of a dead sister—but then I never agreed with her ecstatic religion, and she could hardly agree with my morals. A delicate and thoughtful attention.'

'Oh!' His wife stepped back. 'I will waste no more words. You fly from us to hide your shameful head. And you cannot escape. We are here—we are all here—with you. Your wife—your son—your niece—your dead sister. Alice would save your life. I am sure she would, if you will turn from your evil ways.'

He laughed a metallic laugh without the least merriment in it.

'Lady Osterley, when I knew you some time ago you were incapable of talking such

nonsense. It is the living hand, not the dead hand, that concerns us.'

'Oh, you are lost—lost—lost!' She wrung her hands in despair. 'Yet, Charles, there is one thing left. All is lost except your name—your father's name—your sister's—your son's. Oh, leave us that!' She threw herself upon her knees before him, weeping. 'For the sake of Alice; for the sake of your mother; for the sake of your son——'

He drew back coldly.

'It is for my own sake, Lady Osterley, believe me, not for your sake at all—I never considered you in the business at all—that I conceal my name. For that reason you may quite rely on a continuance of—of this concealment. And now this interview has perhaps been prolonged enough.'

He took off his hat. She inclined her head and left him. Yet she turned once more to look at him. It was a fine picture that she carried away in her memory—the

last picture that she took of her husband. He was standing bareheaded, hat in hand, his face pale, his bearing erect, his expression proud and austere—a brave and honourable man, to look at. She remembered another picture—some old picture—which represented the execution of an officer. In this picture the officer about to die stood, firm and proud, before he received the shower of bullets. So stood Sir Charles. He must have known that the end was very near: he stood to meet his fate with the cold pride which never forsook him, though the last remains of honour and self-respect had long since disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

BACK AGAIN.

The Master was sitting in his own chair, the victim of extreme despondency. A great and terrible dread was upon him, in so much that his soul was stirred to the very depths. For he could no longer meditate. It was as if the gates of Heaven were closed to him: as if his whole life had been a failure. You have seen that in the evening the customary unconsciousness would not come to him: in the morning, save for a brief—a very brief and terrifying—spell, it was also impossible. Perhaps, he thought, this disquiet was caused by the departure of

the child : perhaps it was a sign that he was now old, and that he was about to be transferred immediately to the next world, or the world after next, should he be worthy. Perhaps he was afflicted with this loss of power by his friends who were waiting for him, as a punishment for letting the child go. So he sat during the hot afternoon in the quiet Hall, an enthusiast with all the enthusiasm gone out of him ; a Prophet who could no longer prophesy. Ever and anon he again attempted Meditation : it was like one afflicted with insomnia trying to sleep : after each attempt, he sat up again and looked about him with dismay.

It is hard on the young when their plans and schemes go wrong and their hopes are crushed. They, however, can invent new plans and work out new schemes. Think, however, what it means to the old, and above all when such a scheme as this, practically a new religion, in good working order, seem-

ingly, for twenty years, is suddenly threatened with collapse! A Prophet must not only believe in his own Prophecy, but he must believe in nothing else. Twenty-two years ago there came to this Prophet, a poor and despised preacher of a humble sect, preaching in a small chapel to a congregation of humble folk, a man who entered by accident; heard with surprise; and ended by becoming, he and his wife, ardent believers in a form of belief which they spiritualized, together with its Prophet, beyond his dreams. They gave him the power of living the life which he desired: they filled it, and himself, with hopes and endeavours which he by himself could never devise or attain to.

Well: he had given this life to a folk mostly of the common order of ill-educated enthusiasts: he thought it enough to turn them into the House as one turns sheep into a field: he gave them nothing to feed their minds or to stimulate their imagination:

neither prayer ; nor praise ; nor holy times or seasons ; nor singing : nor reading : nor exhortation. The machine went on, day by day ; the wants of the body were supplied : they fell readily into the trance condition, which is, indeed, as contagious as fits : they were silent : they worked a little : they rested a great deal : they asked for nothing. The Master never taught or preached : the only corporate action was the criticism of the Committee. Upon all this fell a daily increasing terror of Outside : everyone believed that his neighbour soared to heights incredible while in Meditation : and everyone believed in the holiness of the House under the influence of its peculiar institution. No one believed in this more than the Master. In the rows of cataleptic brethren, he beheld the inanimate bodies of disciples whose souls, after his teaching and example, had flown upwards to realms beyond the skies.

We must never ask how far the Master

was truthful as regards the discourses which he held with Alice. That question must not be put. The vulgar pretender who writes on slates and unties knots must not be classed with such as the Master. He is neither a pretender nor a fraud. He has, to begin with, an ardent imagination: he sees things, actually, as they never exist: he believes so thoroughly that he realizes his own belief: if he believes in the spirit world, he goes into the spirit world and lives there.

And now the beautiful castle of cards lay fallen and scattered at his feet. The members were in revolt: his child had run away, and Alice refused to speak to him. At seventy-five such things are hard to endure.

All the morning he sat in the Hall, alone. Outside there were the customary sounds of work: engines throbbed: there was the clatter of pans from the dairy: hammering

from the carpenters' and the blacksmiths' shops: the crowing of cocks: the rumbling of cart-wheels: for work must go on although revolution is in the air.

Presently the door was opened and a lady walked in: not a sister in the garb of the House, but a lady dressed in quite a different fashion: a fashion which in some dim and distant manner reminded him of Alice: she stood there for a moment curiously looking about her, and then went out again, closing the door softly behind her. This gentle treatment of the door, by some cryptic connection of ideas, took his thoughts back to England, the country where doors are never slammed: and again in imagination he saw Alice as he first met her walking on the lawn, a gracious, sweet, and gentle creature, in whose presence, Prophet as he was, he felt low and humble.

The bell rang—the discordant bell—for cessation of Fatigue. The trampling of foot-

steps in the verandah on the stairs of the women's quarters, and about the House, recalled him to the present.

Sister Euphemia came in and sat down beside him just where the child used to sit.

'Master,' she said, 'there were strange things said and done last night. It was an upsetting and an awakening. Now there's going to be more things done, and if I don't mistake, Sister Phœbe's going to give trouble. But don't you mind. She'd like to put her husband in your place. Oh! she's deep. Then she thinks she'll rule the House through Silas. But she won't. Well, we're just tired of sitting still: Meditation is only good for such saints as you and that poor child. As for me, I've never, not for a single day, forgot the Past, nor the trouble that brought me here. But don't you mind, Master. Some among us will stand by you still. You shall have your Meditation, morning, noon, and night, just the same. We

love you too much, dear Master, not to remember what we owe to you. Don't look like that, Master. It takes but little to set a woman crying. And you *shall* get back your child—you shall.'

The bell rang for Restoration. The men and women streamed in, and the feeding was conducted with a heartiness which almost forbade the idea of Revolution.

After Restoration the men went out into the verandah: the women divided into two parties: the larger of which, under Sister Euphemia, retired to the women's wing; the smaller, under the guidance of Sister Phœbe, went off to one of the workrooms.

The Master was left alone again. And still he sat in his armchair with heavy heart and dismal forebodings.

About three o'clock in the afternoon the doors flew open, and the child came running in—and, with her, Gilbert. But what a child! How transformed! She looked like

nothing less than her own mother twenty years ago, before the dress of the House was invented. Her beauty, of which he had only been dimly conscious; her dress; her changed look, dazzled and bewildered him. Yet she was not changed. She sat down in her own place at the end of the bench beside his chair. She took his hands in hers—the old wrinkled hands in her warm and tender hands. 'Master,' she said, 'dear Master, I could not leave you here alone. I have come back to take you away with me.'

He only understood that she was come back. 'My dear,' he said, 'I fear I have done wrong: yet I meant well. Come closer: don't let go my hand. Cicely, your mother—your mother—is offended with me. The gates are shut:' he trembled and moaned. 'My dear, the gates are shut: the gates to the Upper World: I can no longer pass through them: I cannot meditate. Yet I did it for the best—for the best, my dear.'

He spoke in the broken manner of the old, who understand slowly.

'Yes—yes! my mother knows that: she cannot be offended.'

So she bent over him and kissed him and patted his hand and consoled him.

'Of course, you did it for the best,' said Gilbert cheerfully. 'Why, we ran away partly in order that you should find out the strength of your own Single Attachment. If I cannot live without Cicely, how can you?'

The old man shook his head. He could not live without the child. Yet—to call it a Single Attachment!

'My dear'—he spoke to Cicely, not to Gilbert, because the reference to a Single Attachment perplexed and offended him—'I cannot live without you: it is true—and it was terrible to think that I had driven you out. What could I say to your mother? I was afraid to meet her. That was why

she shut the gates. Perhaps I ought to have discerned things more clearly. I begin to understand that for some natures there must be exceptions. With the nobler soul a Single Attachment may be a help, not a hindrance. She should be your example as she has been my guide. And she loves her husband in the new world as much as in the old. But there were many examples, my dear, in this House, pointing the other way. There have been married people here: every one could see how they quarrelled and called names, and fell into tempers unseemly. I did not distinguish. It was not right to force the daughter of that pure and white Spirit, my Guide, who discourses daily with me, into union with a rustic—as I now understand—coarse and common. Let like mate with like.'

'That is finished, dear Master,' said Cicely. 'We have come to talk about other things. Gilbert will talk for me. You must listen to

what he says. Come! Let us talk together, we three.'

The Master shook his head. He did not expect much to come out of the promised talk: indeed, he would rather have sat quite still and silent, looking at the child, until he might be permitted, as a penitent, to drop into Meditation. But Gilbert began, sitting on the opposite bench.

'First of all, Master,' he said, 'we are very glad, indeed, that you have now learned to distinguish. Marry one with the other, as much as you please; but like with like: not like with unlike. One does not marry a rose of June with a—with an onion of September.'

The Master inclined his head gravely. 'What do you mean,' he said, 'by saying that you have come to take me away? What are you going to do with Cicely?'

'Cicely is in good keeping, Master. Do not be in any anxiety about her.'

'Last night, Cicely,' he began again

querulously, 'I could not meditate. For the first time during twenty years—yes, more than twenty years — I failed to meditate. Again, this morning—I failed. After dinner, just now, it is true I was borne upwards; but only to see that transparent soul clouded, and she said—what did she say? She held her husband by the hand and she rebuked me.' He laid his hand upon his head. 'She said, "Master, should we two be here but for the love we have borne to each other? Should we two have risen so high but for the comfort and stay of one towards the other? Nay: we should have been far lower—far lower—far more selfish—far more earthly. Go now." She told me to go. "We will discourse again when this has been set straight." So I see—at last—that there are natures to whom love is as the sunshine to the flowers—your flowers, Cicely.'

'Nay, Master, I am sure my mother knows that you acted for the best.'

'I have had a terrible time,' he repeated. 'You were gone, Gilbert was gone. Your mother would not receive me, and the members have rebelled against the Rule. I know not what they want: but I cannot fight against them: I am too old: they must go their own way. They no longer believe that we stand alone in space, every one alone.'

Gilbert laughed gently. 'My dear Master, you yourself have never been alone: you have always had your dead friend Alice to sustain you: and you have always entertained a most delightful Single Attachment for Cicely.'

'It is true,' he replied humbly. 'In that sense I have never seemed to be alone. Yet one must be alone. It is a fact which must be recognised. We are born alone: we die alone: we rise or fall alone.'

'Love removes the solitude: you acknowledge that you yourself have never been

alone: you have always loved and been loved: and you have never felt alone.'

'Yet——'

'To ruder natures marriage may be a hindrance. To the rather rough and boorish people here marriage may present itself, when they consider it at all, as a condition of life which is a hindrance to the soul. In marriage they must be absorbed in the cares of the house: the husband working too hard every day: the wife working too hard every day: with sordid accompaniments, privations, quarrels, bad tempers and pinchings.'

'That is so,' the Master interrupted. 'To such persons love might seem a hindrance. Yet it might not be so, because it might possibly produce virtues such as the single life could never attain.'

'Yet, Brother Gilbert, Sister Phœbe was willing to marry you.'

'That excellent Sister,' Gilbert replied softly, 'was so very good as to be willing

to take me, different as I am from her at every point. She is a zealous member of the Rule. Yet she was willing to enter upon a Single Attachment. It proves that the most orthodox member in the whole of this Community actually desires the companionship which is regarded with dislike by the Master.'

'Come back to us, Gilbert, and stay with us. You shall marry Cicely and make your Elevation in your own way.'

'No, Master; that is impossible. I will tell you directly what we propose.'

'Stay with us, Gilbert,' he repeated. 'The Community will be the richer for your presence. Besides, I can read your soul through and through. Like my dead friend Raymond you are true and loyal: you have no selfish purpose of your own to serve.'

'Nevertheless, I came here, five weeks ago, with a purpose which I did not confess to you.'

'It was some purpose connected with the man who calls himself Charles Lee. I know now. I do not know how I learned it: nor what your purpose was. It is now too late, because to-morrow he leaves the House. I have turned him out.'

'Oh! You have turned him out? Curious. Yes: I think he will go to-morrow.'

Gilbert's face grew hard. But only for a moment. He returned to the business before him.

'You tell me,' he said, 'that your members are in a state of rebellion. Frankly, I do not wonder. When I came here and began to look about and to talk to them it seemed to me as if they were all dropping slowly into a condition in which nothing would be left to them except a mouth for the reception of food. They were becoming like unto the common slug. I went about the workshops: only those members who felt that they must put forth a certain amount of bodily exertion

and fatigue were turning out any real work. The Farm: the Dairy: the Garden: the Laundry—those do well because the bodily exertion keeps life in them: all the rest are shams. You have the account-books—is it not so?'

'It is so.'

'You have taken from these people everything, except a little work and a great deal of food. You have left nothing that can occupy their minds. You discourage conversation because it may become frivolous. What is the consequence? They cannot talk any longer: they never speak: many of them have almost forgotten how to frame a sentence—my friend Silas, for instance, is almost inarticulate. You think, from the heights on which you live, that everybody will be thinking of things high and sacred when you have left them nothing else.'

The Master inclined his head again. 'True.

Their minds naturally turn in the direction of things high and sacred.'

'Do they? Then you have not suffered them to read books, and they never leave this place. Therefore, they think about what you have left them. What is that? Food, chiefly, and repose—vacuous repose. Do any of them meditate on higher things? I do not know: I can see no sign of any such Meditation. Most of them appear to me to be exactly like the hogs in a sty: they feed: they sleep: they grunt. In the evening they fall into a state of catalepsy: when they recover they remember nothing. Of what good is their catalepsy, of which they remember nothing?'

'It is hoped that in time they will remember. For my own part I do remember.'

'So does Cicely, sometimes. The rest—never. I have asked them all. Each thinks that others remember: they believe in glimpses and glances, and flashes of light.

They know only that they have been unconscious. I suppose that the dropping off is pleasant, and perhaps the recovery as well: otherwise they wouldn't do it at all. But as for the help they get from it, I can tell you, Master, speaking quite plainly, there is none at all. You and Cicely are the only two with whom the Hour of Meditation is more than an hour of catalepsy. You have restored, you say, the Eastern custom of Meditation to the West. Well—to all these people—your rank and file, the custom is a pretence and a sham.'

The Master groaned. He had not the strength to dispute the point. He could not in this hour of despondency stand up for his teaching or its results.

'It is not your fault. You imagined that these people were made of the same material as yourself and your earliest disciples. That is not so. They are a highly nervous and excitable people, because they are Americans.

They have been brought up in a narrow and selfish religion, in which Individualism is carried to its extreme. They are easily reduced to the condition of trance by their nervous organization : and they are enabled to accept your teaching of the separate and lonely condition of the soul because it falls in with their own early religion. I dare say they honestly hope to penetrate by this way into the other world. Meantime, what are their habitual thoughts? They have none : they have lost the influences of their former life—their church, their singing, their religious exercises : and you have given them nothing in place of these things. They grow worse, therefore, every day, instead of better : more animal, and less intellectual ; half a dozen, already, at least, have become pure imbeciles who can only eat and sleep and go into trance : they have gone back to the primeval prehistoric creature consisting of a bag to hold food and a mouth, and two hands to put food into it !'

'You are hard, Gilbert,' said Cicely. 'Spare the Master.'

'One person alone has kept her mind open and healthy. You gave Cicely, happily, the only work that could have kept her mentally awake. She has lived among the flowers. They are live things to her: they speak to her: and she has talked with you every day—about her dead parents—until she has grown to know them both, and believe that in trance she speaks with them——'

'Nay: not believes: she does speak with them every day.'

'It is well for her that she does, then. Now, Master, what do you think of my picture?'

'I cannot say what I think—I am an old man. If this is true, then have I spent my life in vain: and I have led these poor people after a will-o'-the-wisp.'

'Nay: at least, they have led in this place innocent and harmless lives. What would

they be doing Outside? Cheating each other in trade, perhaps. Struggling, ignobly, to lead an ignoble life. You have done no harm to them. Don't think of it that way.'

'What way, then? Cicely, tell me how I am to think of it. You tell me this—and that'—he spoke in a wandering, helpless kind of fashion, his eyes unsteady — the Master, who had been always so alert and strong that one forgot his seventy-five years. 'You say that Cicely will not stay. How can I think at all without her? How can I live without the child?'

'You shall keep your child,' said Gilbert, moved to pity by his weakness and distress.

'We shall not part, dear Master,' said Cicely, 'believe me. Never again.'

'Tell him, Cicely, what we have planned for him.'

Gilbert left them together in the Hall. He closed the door, and sat down in the verandah. Beyond the lane, under the shade

of the trees, sat, as usual, the man whose fate was to be determined on the morrow. He sat motionless—his legs crossed, his hands folded—hatless—his face white as of marble, his lips set—the man whom nothing could move.

The place—it was nearly five in the afternoon—was very silent : now and again there was heard the lowing of kine. The engines had ceased their throbbing, and there was no grinding of the wheels : the work of the day was over. Gilbert thought of the strange, apathetic people, who had no interests in life and cared for nothing, and believed that they were making straight for Heaven by going off into trance every night. 'Many and wonderful,' he thought, 'are the ways that lead to the narrow gate ; but truly this of the nightly trance is the most wonderful. To do nothing except to become insensible. Heard one ever a more remarkable belief in the efficacy of annihilation ?'

Presently the bell rang for supper, and the Community came flocking in to the Hall. First the men, with slow but resolute step, advancing to the chief event of the day. Even the most vacuous faces lit up when that discordant bell began to clash and clang. 'Pork and cabbage!' it cried aloud. 'Come! Pork and cabbage! Pork and beans! Come! Tender loin and tough! Beef and bacon! Come! Huckleberry and apple pie! Come! Coffee and iced water! Come! Supper first and Meditation after. Work finished. Recreation done. Come! come! come!'

They looked at Gilbert in curiosity as they passed: something had been said about running away: but it mattered nothing to them now. They wanted to eat, and then to sleep, and afterwards to become insensible. The women were not so punctual: they dropped in by twos and threes. Among them was Sister Euphemia.

'You, Gilbert?' she cried. 'You are back again?'

'I have brought Cicely to see the Master. They are both unhappy without each other. And you, Euphemia—why—what have you done to yourself?'

'Some of us have discarded the old costume—we've been dressmaking all the afternoon—I hope you like my new dress. I made it myself this afternoon, from an old frock that I haven't worn for twenty years.'

She had tied up her hair with a ribbon; she wore lengthened skirts so that the horrible trouserette thing at the ankles had either vanished or been sent away: she had a coloured ribbon round her neck and a little bunch of flowers at her throat and a coloured silk sash: and her frock was in the fashion of the year 1875, when she left the Outside. Well, it is not so very long ago, but there was an old world look about it.

'I congratulate you, dear Euphemia. And what next?'

'Oh! a good deal next. But come in.'

The Hall was full by this time. The Master sat in his own chair, at the head of the middle table: but beside him was Cicely —and he held her hand in his, and his eyes dwelt upon her as if he could not bear to let anything else be seen at all.

Sister Euphemia took her place. Brother Charles did not appear at all.

'Cicely is with the Master,' said Euphemia. 'Oh! it would kill him to part with her. He loves her as much as an old man can love a girl. And yet he wouldn't allow a Single Attachment! That's going to be changed.'

Sister Euphemia's manner was quite altered. She had gone back, it seemed, to her old self, which was a cheerful, chattering self.

'I will take Cicely's place this evening.'

She did so. Gilbert took his old place as before. Opposite him sat Sister Phœbe. On his left was Brother Silas. Neither of them took the least notice of him, except by their shoulders, which were expressive.

'Oh, Brother Gilbert,' Euphemia went on, 'how nice it is to see you back again! You should have been in the Hall last night. Oh, but you don't know. Here are the Bride and Bridegroom—congratulate them.'

She indicated the blushing pair.

'What do you mean?' asked Gilbert.

'Why, after you went away, the Master ordered these two to marry each other, so's to cure them of Single Attachments. Brother Silas, you know, was singly attached to Cicely and Sister Phœbe was singly attached to you. Their condition was dangerous as regards Elevation.'

'Really!' Gilbert's face assumed quite a rosy wreath of smiles. 'Permit me, Sister Phœbe, to wish you every joy—and you—

Brother Silas. Happy Dog!—I have been thinking, Sister Phœbe,' he said, with another smile, 'what could be designed to make you happier, if anything could be hit upon; and truly, I do not think there is anyone in all this House more worthy for you in every respect—none able to meet every virtue and grace in yourself with one corresponding of his own—than Brother Silas. You will soar—happy, wingless spirits—together: and I am quite sure that you can neither of you mount so much as a single inch higher than the other.'

Sister Phœbe looked ominous, but she said nothing. She was quick enough to understand what was meant. Brother Silas was not: he only understood that something dangerous was said: something scornful.

'I hate an Englishman,' he replied doggedly.

'Why, then,' said Gilbert, 'what could more endear you to Sister Phœbe? How

better could you hope to soar than on the wings of such a sentiment?'

'Don't make him mad,' whispered Euphemia. 'He's half mad already at losing Cicely. Let him be. He'll take it out in ill temper with his wife. I know that sort.'

'And you have had a mutiny, or a rebellion, I hear.'

'Yes: we only began last night. We are going on, though. Things have got to be changed a bit. Why, when you came here first it was like a great big tomb. I didn't mind. The Past was buried; there was no more joy left: I'd just as soon be buried in the tomb with all the rest. Nobody spoke, nobody laughed, nobody cared for anybody. We were all selfish logs. Then you came and broke us up. Oh, we are going to change a good many things! We are going to make things hum. Going to stay, Brother Gilbert? See you've got your store-clothes

on. So's Cicely. My! Isn't she just too lovely?'

'I'm not going to stay, I fear.'

'And Cicely?'

'She will not stay either. She will come with me.'

'Then I tell you, young man, that the Master will just sit down and die. As for me, I don't know but what I'll go back again —Outside. There's Mamie and James—I don't know how they're doing, nor what children they've got. Since the Past came back—you brought it back—yet it never really left me—it's borne in upon me that I ought to go and see them. I've got a little money, so's not to be a burden upon anybody, and perhaps to be a help—and—and—I shall see. If the Master goes, and you, and Cicely—this will be a poor kind of place for such as me.'

'But your Meditations?'

'Bless you, my dear boy, with an apron

over my head I can meditate anywhere. Besides'—she dropped her voice—'what's the good? I never remember anything. Sometimes there's a kind of a sort of a flash—just a gleam—but nothing comes of it. I shouldn't wonder if I went away and never came back here any more.'

Just then the shuffling of feet and the colliding of plates showed that the repast was concluded.

'Now for Meditation,' said Euphemia cheerfully.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MASTER ABDICATES.

At that moment, contrary to reasonable expectation, instead of stretching out his legs, folding his hands and going off into Meditation without any delay, the Master rose in his place, looked round the room, as every Master, Professor, or Lecturer does, to command attention, and held up his hand. Then those who were preparing to meditate recalled the soul just stepping out of its earthly tenement for its night ramble among undiscovered worlds, and sat upright with open eyes and great astonishment. And silence fell upon all: for the Master was going to

speak. Great as had been the recent events in the House, this was the greatest event of all. The Master was going to address them.

He began to speak : at first, because he was out of practice, with hesitating words, and with half-forgotten phrases that he was seeking after and recovering. But as he went on, his old power came back to him : that magic touch by which oratory commands and holds an audience returned once more ; and, as his rich full voice rolled about the walls and among the rafters, his hearers listened as much entranced as in Meditation itself. Some there were who heard the music of his voice but could no longer understand the meaning of his words—these were the vacuous members whose minds had been completely cleaned out and emptied : they understood nothing : and they presently, after a little uncomfortable patience under the unaccustomed, fell into their usual condition of temporary annihilation. The newly-

married pair, also, received the preaching without any show of enthusiasm, because their minds were now naturally full of themselves. The honeymoon was cloudy, with promise of much rain and heaviness, which shows how Elevation is hindered by the wedded condition even without the distraction of the Single Attachment. As for the discourse itself, one cannot reproduce the whole of it. But the following is perhaps the more important part: the part which most concerns this narrative.

'My children, my brothers, my sisters,' said the Prophet, 'it is long since I have addressed the Community: it is many years since I have spoken on our common Life and on its objects. It is so long that most of you have never heard my voice at all and have never learned the reasons why I founded this House with Raymond, my first Brother, and Alice, my first Sister.

'It was our sole intention in founding this

House to further Elevation—so that, when the time for migration arrived, we should be enabled to take our places at once in an upper and a happier world. There are, as you know, endless worlds: we are always rising or always falling: man is never at rest: therefore there is always room for anxiety as regards the future: yet there has grown up in my mind a steadfast belief and consolation that, as man rises higher, descent becomes less easy for him: in other words, Elevation strengthens as well as raises. But the great mass of men and women, from generation to generation, hover about, now above, and now below: and the lower we fall, the more difficult it is to rise, the easier it is to fall lower still: and the pit is bottomless: for there is no depth but what there lies a deeper depth below. There may come a time when a man may cease altogether to discern good from evil, or to desire any good thing at all.

'I know these things, partly because they were revealed to me long ago: partly because I am confirmed in the knowledge by daily commune with the parents of Sister Cicely, whom we foolishly and wickedly drove from among us, the Daughter of the House. They are things which Outside knows not at all, thinking that this existence begins and ends everything, or else that it is the prelude to unearned happiness, or undeserved agonies to last for ever. Why did I not preach these things Outside? Because it would be useless. No one would listen: no one would believe, as I quickly learned. The prejudices and the early teaching and the poetry and the literature of Outside all alike maintain the old belief. I therefore refrained from further effort and withdrew, coming over here with my only two disciples to live the life of Meditation for which Outside is, as yet, unfitted.

'How did we propose to lead that life?

First by seclusion : we would be quite alone with our own thoughts, undisturbed. We would have none of the temptations of Outside : there should be no desire at all to make money : there must be no anxieties about keeping the body alive and in health. These two main points we secured by resolving that everybody in the House should do every day a fair day's work of seven or eight hours : we had money enough with us to buy this land and to build a frame-house of three or four rooms to begin with : we lived simply, as we do now. Then, having made it possible to feed the body, we had to keep it well and strong and free from pain, because physical pain affects the mind. So we resolved, whether we wanted money or not, upon taking exercise, if not by our work, then in some other way—in the open air : this we called Fatigue : it was, as you know, followed by daily Restoration in the common Hall. It was necessary, we also thought, to

keep the mind in health and strength : therefore we would have Recreation in the afternoon. And thus everything led up to the great work for which this House stands alone, namely, Elevation by Meditation. Yes : we introduced once more into the Western world the long forgotten practice of Meditation. It is peculiar to ourselves. We may boast, if we allowed ourselves to boast at all, that there is no other place, out of India, where Meditation is the chief end and aim of existence. We do not read—why should we ? Reading is a distraction, not an aid : it leads the mind away : it suggests disturbing thoughts : it is a disquieting influence : it is full of Outside. What can reading teach us ? Nothing, we thought, that is helpful. Nothing that elevates. We do not conduct services—why should we ? Retired from man, we do not need the services of prayer and praise that are necessary—Outside—in order to withdraw their

minds from their own work. We have no ambitions: we have no social distinctions: we have no cark or care about business: for us such services as the world desires would prove to be disturbing. We have no sermons. Why should we want a preacher? He can warn and admonish Outside, not ourselves: we need no such admonition, because there is no evil doing or evil thinking in this Community. Aids there are—music—dancing—the rhythmic motion of the body to the sound of music—these may help. Then we are, every one of us, alone in the vast universe: we do not therefore want any of the so-called alleviations of solitude—the illusions of love—the daily companionship of another—the mirage of the Single Attachment. Quite alone we live: quite alone we meditate: quite alone we climb. That is why in Retirement and in Repose we occupy each a solitary cell.'

There was a solemnity in the last utterance

which made Gilbert, at least, think that in Outside most people slept six in a room.

The Master continued: 'One thing was necessary for the success of this endeavour—namely, a severance complete and absolute from the Past. We must forget the Past. It is our chief rule—forget the Past. Bring to Meditation a mind cleared of all that has gone before. Let there be no memory of it: no regret for it: no longing for it. Let it be dead—all the follies of the Past—all that made it pleasant or unhappy. This is our only Rule: the rest is practice or custom which has grown up. On that condition we admitted everybody—the greatest sinner—the greatest criminal—if he or she would forget the Past.' Here some of the Community hung their heads. 'I fondly hoped that all had forgotten the Past. There can be no true Meditation without it. I learn to-day, to my confusion and shame, that the Past has not been forgotten. You still remember it, some

of you: you live in the Past: you think of the Past all day long. One among us whose Past was very black, I have ordered to leave the House. How many more of you are there who still remember the Past?'

'Master,' it was Sister Euphemia who rose up and replied, 'I have never forgotten the Past. I lived in it as in a grave, till Brother Gilbert came and bade me think of the present. In Meditation there has never come even a gleam of light or a ray of hope.' She sat down.

Another woman rose—a woman who had once been beautiful.

'I have never forgotten the Past,' she said, 'except in Meditation, I see it always. There are the fingers of scorn and the cruel eyes. The Past can never be forgotten.'

And then a man arose. 'Master, why should we try to forget what follows us like our shadow? The Past cannot be forgotten. In Meditation we seem to forget it, because

we are senseless. As for climbing into higher planes, I know nothing about any climbing at all. The Past is always before me. If I had continued in Outside I might have forgotten it. Things happen there to make one forget the Past: we must press onwards: we are driven on. But here? Nothing happens. The Past is always before me, like a ghost.'

An unhappy Past, this man's.

And another. And another. And another. All followed with the same story of the Past that they could not forget.

The Master bowed his head. 'My children,' he said, 'I have lived in a Fool's Paradise. I thought you were climbing high into other worlds, while you were only sinking into forgetfulness to escape the living Past. We must change all this. There have been other signs of discontent—the trouble about the women's dress. I never thought upon the subject. I wished you all to have the same

dress so that there should be no rivalry in vanities. You wish that dress changed for some other—perhaps you wish to dress as you please. Well: remember only the main object of the Community. What else do you desire?'

'We want books to read,' said one; and a murmurous approval came from every voice. 'Books,' they said. 'Books to read.'

The Master bowed his head. 'If books will not distract you,' he said, 'read books.'

'And the newspapers,' said another. And from every man there came a shout: 'The newspapers! The newspapers!' They were Americans, and they had never seen a newspaper since they entered the House! The thirst for the newspapers came back to them like a flood or a mountain torrent after rain. 'The newspapers!' they repeated again and again.

'And we want,' said Sister Euphemia, 'a

chapel and regular services and a choir to sing hymns.'

'Yes,' said another woman. 'And tea meetings.'

'And a Minister.'

'And Lectures.' They remembered, little by little, all the old life and the things that they used to love.

'And a Sunday School.'

'And a Literary Society.'

'And picnics and Surprise parties.'

'And not to work on Sabbath Day.'

'And concerts.'

'And prayer meetings.'

'And dramatic performances.'

'And missionary meetings.'

They cried one after the other.

'And SHOPPING,' said Sister Euphemia solemnly. Then all the women sighed and smiled and gasped as with a yearning after the long lost. 'Oh! how we could meditate,' Euphemia added, 'after a

morning's shopping, and in a dress like Sister Cicely's!'

It seemed as if the last word had been spoken. What could be added?

But Sister Phœbe rose in her place and spoke. 'And we want besides—we want—for incompatibility of temper — we want Divorce.'

Silas looked round him slowly. 'I can't talk much,' he said. 'I never could talk much. But I don't mind if we do have Divorce.'

'In short,' said the Master, 'you want in everything a return to Outside. So be it. For my own part, I am too old to change. I must continue till I die in the old lines. Well, I have made up my mind to hand over the charge of the House to others. Choose your own Master. As for me, I am going away with Cicely and Gilbert. I leave you in prosperity: the House has been largely blessed, the barns are overflowing: there is money at the Bank: the farm is

stocked: the gardens are productive: the workshops are fitted with all that is wanted. Keep up the habit of daily Fatigue, and remember that the aim of the Community is Elevation not Degradation. Keep up the common Restoration: the Recreation: the Meditation. As for the rest, you will add to our simple life what you think best. In one thing I have been wrong. There are some to whom love—I mean the Single Attachment—is a necessity of their lives. It has been impressed upon me by recent events, and by the contemplation of Raymond and Alice always together, always thinking of each other first, always rising together—that the upward Way to some may lie through Single Attachment. I was led to think otherwise by inexperience: I have never in my life loved any woman in that way—the two women whom I love most are Alice, who is my sister: and Cicely, who is my child. Forget all that I have said about the Single

Attachment: yet do not seek it, do not think of it, lest it prove unworthy, and so become a snare and a pitfall. Outside, I know, they write and think about the Single Attachment as if life had no other joy.

'I leave this place. I would have stayed on until the end, but I perceive very clearly that you will have change. Forgive me if I have injured or wounded anyone by criticism or in any other way. We have been for the most part a harmonious community. Until the last day or two there has been nothing to mar the peace of our home. Let me believe that it will be carried on, if not in the same way—the old believe there is no other way—then with the same ends in view. And now, dear friends, let me not think the work of my life has been a failure. Keep the same end in view. Let me die happy in the thought that though you may change the method, you preserve the truths that have brought us together. Think of the blessings that have

fallen upon us all—the increased wealth—the easy life that has been granted to you. Where else would you find a life so easy or food so abundant, or work so light? Remember these things, and, if you would have them continued, observe the way of life; the industry: the Community: the Simplicity: which have given them to you. And now, dear brothers and sisters, I make an end. Farewell! farewell!'

He walked down the Hall slowly, his tall and venerable figure slightly bent, his soft and limpid eyes dim with tears. With him, one on each side, walked Cicely and Gilbert. Now, at the sight of this abdication, the members suddenly recollected all that the Master had done for them: they remembered, as he had reminded them, the peace and order, the abundance, the light work, the quiet of the life. The women wept and kissed his hands. 'Stay, Master, stay!' they cried. But he shook his head sadly. The

men caught at his hands. 'Stay, Master, stay!' they cried. But he shook his head. His life-work was done. If there had been one—only one—to rise up and proclaim the blessing of Meditation, and how it had enabled his soul to soar aloft to heights ineffable, then, perhaps, he would have stayed. But there was none. They had not forgotten the Past, and they could not remember whither they went, or what they saw and heard, in Meditation. Not one to stand up for the Rule! What, think you, would have been the feelings of St. Francis of Assisi, if, at the close of his life, there had not been found one single brother or sister to soothe his soul with the assurance of one at least who had been raised by the Rule? Not one to declare the efficacy of Meditation! Yes: there were about a dozen. Gilbert remarked them. They proclaimed its efficacy, because at the beginning of this long speech they had 'gone off' as usual, and were now

sitting, with outstretched feet, heads back and eyes open, in that trance which was become their passion—the desire of which was a yearning stronger than the yearning for drink, more irresistible than the yearning for the green table. They illustrated the efficacy of the Rule : they had neither past nor future : their minds and memories and brains were swept out and empty : not even a cob-web was left in them : they had nothing to think about except the regularly recurrent joy of Restoration and that of 'going off' into blankness and returning with a vague sense of glories witnessed and forgotten.

'Look!' Gilbert would have said, but refrained. 'There are the triumphs of your system! There are the people who have been elevated by Meditation!' In their places at the table, nearly opposite to each other, sat the newly-married pair. Their faces indicated the happiness of a honeymoon undertaken by order. They alone, except

the Vacuous Ones, suffered the Master to depart without a word of regret. Their cheeks burned, their eyes showed the deepest resentment. Silas was inarticulate, but he gazed after Cicely with a strange and rather dangerous look of the wild animal ready to fight for his mate. It wanted but little for him to rise and fall upon his rival. But he wanted words in which to clothe that temptation. He could say nothing.

'Silas!' Phœbe said, 'you ought to have followed him and brought them both back. You are a coward—you are a coward. It's too late now.'

Said Silas: 'I hate an Englishman.'

'Here they come,' said Phœbe, loud enough to be heard by the Master if he was listening, and by Gilbert, who did listen, pleased to observe the discomfiture of these zealous members. 'Here they come—with their Single Attachments against the rules. Let them go. We don't want Englishmen

here. I hate an Englishman, too, Silas—you great log—you great coward—do you hear? If there's law in the land we'll have a divorce!'

'I want it,' said Silas the Unready, after a pause, 'worsen you.'

'Here,' Gilbert would have said, but did not, 'are two more examples of the House. They are the most zealous to carry out the Rules. Have they been elevated in the least? One began as a Boor, and so remains, with the manners and the habits of a Boor: had he been taught instead of being left alone, he might have become a kind of gentleman. The other is a village shrew, with the tongue and the mind and the passion of her class.'

So they passed through the people and went out. There was waiting for them a carriage, and they put the Master in and drove away.

'I have brought you the Master, Dorabyn,'

said Gilbert. 'He has made up his mind to resign his Mastership, and to live with Cicely wherever she may go.'

Lady Osterley gave the old man her most gracious welcome. He was a good deal worn by the fatigues and excitements of the day, and he looked old and shaken. It has been seen that the revolt of his people was trying after so many years of peaceful rule. Moreover, the strangeness and the newness of the place troubled him; and the aspect, even the gracious welcome, of the *grande dame* embarrassed him. Remember that for twenty years and more he had never stepped outside the House of his Community. He sat down and looked about the room as if he hardly understood what was happening. He was like a domestic cat taken to a strange house. His bewilderment became alarming.

'Master,' said Cicely, taking his hand, 'you know me, don't you? I am Cicely, your daughter.'

'Yes—yes—Cicely. I know you, but I do not know myself. Where is the Community?'

'Dear Master, if you will go and talk with my mother a little! Please play something,' she said. 'He wants his usual Meditation; then he will get better.'

Lady Osterley complied, playing things that soothe: things that float about the brain and allay all kinds of trouble. The old man sat quite still and silent, listening to the music. Then his head fell back: his feet stretched themselves out: his hands lay folded: and he became rigid like a dead man. He was once more in Meditation.

'Heavens!' Lady Osterley whispered. 'Does he do this every night?'

'Every night,' Gilbert replied. 'You need not whisper: you can talk as loud as you please, he will not hear you.'

'Why does he do it?'

'He believes that in trance he can transport his soul wherever he pleases. He goes

to converse with his friend Alice—Cicely's mother. She sends messages by Cicely and by him to me, you know.'

'Gilbert! Again. This from you? I shall end by believing.'

'I assure you again, Dorabyn, that I cannot choose but believe. However, now that he is off, I should like——' He glanced at Cicely. She looked restless; her face was assuming the expression that fell upon the Community when they could not 'go off' so easily as was customary. 'Play something else—play a waltz—the best waltz that you know. I think that you will be rewarded for your trouble.'

Lady Osterley changed the music: she played a most lovely waltz: one of those that make old people remember their youth, and make them sick with yearning for the impossible return, and put life, and joy, and cadenced motion into the feet of the young. And then she learned why Gilbert asked for a waltz.

For Cicely rose, her face grave and serious, as one who begins some religious function. She rose, as if unconscious of the presence of any other person; she stepped into the middle of the room, and then began one of those mystic, self-taught dances of hers which had so moved Gilbert on the first day of Meditation. It was a kind of skirt dance, with movements of the arms, and bendings of the body—a graceful dance, in which every limb played its part, but without contortions, and quite seriously. Dorabyn played and looked on in amazement. 'Faster!' cried Gilbert. She played the waltz faster—faster. Then the girl turned up her arms over her head, and whirled round swiftly. Dorabyn brought the music to an end with a crash of chords, and Cicely sank breathless, with closed eyes, into Gilbert's arms. He laid her on a sofa, apparently lifeless.

Lady Osterley left the piano, and bent over the girl, lying supine on the long, low couch.

'Strange!' she whispered. 'Last night I was ready to call it Death. And this they have been doing every night! Yes, Gilbert, such a wonderful, mysterious power as this would be sure to attract the mystic nature of Alice Osterley. Cicely, as I look at her, grows more and more like her mother as I remember her. A delicate creature, Gilbert. She will want all the love and thought that you can give her if she is really like her mother.'

'She will have all the love and thought that I can give her.'

Gilbert stooped and kissed her forehead. It was very cold, as in death. He lifted her hand and felt her pulse. There was none perceptible, nor did she seem to breathe. He sat down beside her, and they began to talk in whispers.

'See,' he said, 'there is nothing of her left but the shell. Life and thought have gone out of her. It is a beautiful shell, Dorabyn.

Did mortal maiden ever before have a face so delicate and so sweet?'

'She is very beautiful, Gilbert. I hope she will not become too saintly for this world's use. But I think not. Alice had a husband who was like herself. They encouraged each other. This girl will have a more earthly husband. You must not destroy the spiritual side of her. But you will not.'

'She has gone to see her mother. They are talking together now.'

'Gilbert!'

'I say, Dorabyn, that I cannot choose but believe. She has told me things that she could not otherwise know: as that her mother was in Lucknow when it was relieved—a little girl—and that my father, then a subaltern, took her up and kissed her. Well, my father was with his regiment at the Relief of Lucknow. How could Cicely know that fact?'

'It is difficult to answer that question. Still——'

'Still, I must believe these things because now, in a way that I cannot explain to you, the whole of this child's happiness, and that of—of other people as well—depends upon their truth.'

He spoke very seriously—more seriously than he had ever spoken before—this young man who mostly took things so lightly. And, indeed, there was something solemn in the presence of these two lifeless persons lying as if dead. Dorabyn whispered in reply, but what she whispered were no more than words of sympathy—such words as belong to a woman.

'If the messages are from Alice—really and truly from Alice—they must be true messages, for Alice is all truth and purity through and through, in death as in life.'

The Master was the first to return. He looked round; he remembered where he was and what had happened: he laid his hand on his forehead.

'My children,' he said, remembering. 'Have no fear. I am commanded to tell you—have no fear: for all is well—and all will continue well. Peace and love and union which shall never be destroyed. All is well.'

Then he rose and, as at the House, he retired after Meditation to Repose.

They sat beside the unconscious girl.

At last she, too, returned.

'You have come back, Cicely.'

'Yes, Gilbert. And oh! I am to dance no more.'

'To dance no more?'

'My mother tells me that I am to dance no more. And I am to have no more Meditation. And until she calls me, I am to have no more talk with her. Gilbert, she tells me to think of nothing now—not of her—or of the Master—or of the House—but only and always—all day and all night—of you!'

He stooped and kissed her forehead. And

there was an unwonted dimness in his eyes and a strange choking at his throat.

'And I have a message for Brother Charles.' She looked about the room as if expecting to see him there.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ORDEAL BY CARDS.

It was Saturday morning: the last day of the limit assigned: the day on which the hunted man was to be turned out to the hounds: the last day of grace to the criminal: the day of Death to one or other—perhaps to the avenger. Gilbert sat up in bed when he awoke—not a single minute before the usual time—and said this to himself over and over again. He said it over and over again while he was dressing. It would be a day of Death to one or two. Strange! The full certainty of the fact moved him not one whit. His nerves were perfectly

steady, his pulse was quiet: he felt no anxiety or fear or doubt. Because, you see, he was by this time strangely persuaded of the reality of that message. Because in his brain the words rung and echoed over and over again: 'What must be done shall be done, but not by your hands.'

What should be done? How should it be done? Once more it was as if he ran his head against a brick wall. For there came no answer; none at all. It is impossible to believe certain things, especially certain things calling themselves supernatural. This was no silly nonsense about rapping tables and inverted baskets. It was as if to persons most incredulous as regards things supernatural there had come out of the very skies a message clear and unmistakable, with a promise equally clear and unmistakable. Should such a promise, such a prophecy, to be tested and proved in a few hours, be spoken by a person professing himself

to be a medium, even those who are most incredulous would keep themselves from ridicule or judgment until the time of fulfilment. This was such a promise—Cicely, who delivered the message, declaring that she had received it, could know nothing about his own purpose, nothing about the past history of Brother Charles. Yet the message bade him wait for five weeks—how could the girl invent such a message?—and assured him that what had to be done would be done, but not by his hands. How should Cicely know that his father, of whom she could never have heard, had met her mother in Lucknow when she was a child?

He took up his revolver: he saw that it was loaded: he dropped it into his breast-pocket and descended to breakfast. 'Now we shall see,' he said. Meantime he marvelled that his mind was so calm and his hand so steady. Nothing short of Death faced

him. That meant — to Dorabyn and to Cicely—what? He could not even think. It seemed as if it was some other man's business, not his own.

The others came into the *salle à manger* one by one. Somehow all their faces—even Cicely's—were grave and serious. They took their breakfast almost in silence.

'Something is going to happen,' said Lady Osterley. 'I feel that something is going to happen.'

The touch of the supernatural in the trance of the Master and the girl probably caused this feeling. One cannot look into another world without being saddened. We never hear of mirth or laughter in any other world. It may be that the greatest happiness does not allow of laughter, which belongs to the unexpected and to the imperfect. This experience should be of itself quite enough to account for Dorabyn's shaky nerves. Yes. Something, she was sure, was certainly

going to happen. And, besides, why should one try to account for nerves?

'I have known for some time,' said the Master, 'that something terrible will happen. I have not asked what kind of trouble it will be, or whom it will affect. It is enough for me to know that it will not bring sorrow on this child.'

He spoke in the deepest and most prophetic voice, insomuch that Lady Osterley, who was going to ask if he would take another cup of tea, feared to spoil the effect and held out her hand in silence for the cup.

'Well,' said Mr. Annandale cheerfully, 'since the terrible thing is not going to affect Cicely, it won't affect anybody here except me. And I don't feel the air heavy, not at all; it's a hot, bright, stimulating air. I shall sit in the porch presently with a cigar, and I shall feel warm and good through and through.'

'There is Rebellion at the House,' said

the Master. 'Perhaps it is that which was to happen. They may rebel; they may desire to change things, but they are sound at heart. I am old, and I see no longer so well as formerly the meaning and the forces of things. The young must reign over the world. It is the rule of the world.'

'You may trust them, Master,' said Gilbert. 'They have most of the things they want—they will only let in a little light from outside. Nowhere else could they continue to enjoy their three square meals a day even without the Meditation of the evening. They will all stay where they are.'

After breakfast Gilbert, without any explanation—without feeling impelled even to say farewell to Cicely—quietly ordered a carriage and drove to the House.

He arrived there about half-past ten, an hour when Fatigue is commonly in full swing. This morning no one was in the gardens; there was no sound of the engine

from the workshops; there was no sign of any work at all. But from the Refectory came the clash and clang—as discordant as the sound of the bell—of many voices—yea, even of fifty speaking like one. The Revolt was going on. Speaking as a historian, they were in the middle of the second chapter.

So complete was the tranquillity of Gilbert's mind that even on this occasion, when his very life was hanging on a chance, he could postpone that business while he looked into the Hall for a few minutes upon this Parliament of rebels.

Everybody was there, and there were apparently divisions and dissensions—they were split up into knots and circles, all talking at once. And at one end of the Hall sat the company of the Vacuous who had too faithfully interpreted the Rule, and now had neither voice nor understanding left. They sat together, huddled like sheep, and they trembled.

Then Sister Phœbe sprang out from a knot of eager disputants, and jumped upon the Master's chair and spoke from that place as from a position of authority. Her shrill voice rang through the Hall like a prolonged shriek: her flushed cheek showed the excitement which possessed her.

'The Master has gone,' she cried. 'Why are we lamenting over what cannot be helped? He is gone. Well—we can do better without him. He was too old: he was held down by a Single Attachment. Let us have a younger Master. Let us elect him at once, lest we fall into confusion. We must not wait a single hour. Why should we? Have we not a Brother—the only Brother who is fit to replace him? Has he not been the real Master for years? Who has provided Restoration for us? Brother Silas! Who finds us three regular meals a day? Brother Silas! The meals come out of the profits of the farm which he manages.

Look at him! There is your true Master. He is the man you want.'

Brother Silas sat in his place quite silent, taking no part whatever in the discussion, even when it concerned himself.

'Look at him, I say! He is your farmer: on him depends everything—all your well-being. And he will sustain the Rule. Nothing but the Simple Rule. That must be maintained and obeyed. We won't have any new things to disturb us. The Simple Rule for us—the Simple Rule. Who is the man to elect for the Simple Rule? The man who manages your farm. No other. He will go on managing your farm and providing the three square meals a day. Nobody else can. Look at him! There is your Master!' She pointed again at Silas, who shook his head for want of words. 'What will you do for them, Silas?'

He made reply, shortly, 'Restoration.'

Gilbert, looking in at the door, marvelled

at the change which a short twelve hours had accomplished. Last night the woman was glaring with thunder on her brow and lightnings in her eyes at the husband imposed upon her—call it the Alliance demanded by the Rule. She was crying out for divorce: she was calling her husband Log and Coward. This morning all was changed. She was crying out for her husband to be elected Master of the Community, with, apparently, no more thought or desire for divorce. A little later, when he was able to recall the scene, he remembered that marriage may very well become a partnership for purposes of ambition. As Dorabyn married the man who was certain to be Prime Minister for the sake of the position, so Phœbe was ready to remain the consort of Silas if he was to be Master—knowing full well who, in that case, would be the real Master of the Community.

'We will have no change,' she repeated, 'the Rule must not be altered.' She spoke

as if it was the Ten Commandments or the American Constitution. 'There's Fatigue and Repose. There's Restoration and Recreation. There's Elevation and Meditation. No change. And there's Criticism. There's nothing more to desire. But we must all work harder. There have been slugs among us. We must put more heart into the work. Else there will be Criticism —and Expulsion.'

'We won't have Brother Silas,' cried little Sister Euphemia, jumping on the table; 'we'll have a man who can speak, not a dumb one who can only eat and work. And we're going to have lots of change. We're going to dress like decent people, and we shall have our Pastor and our Chapel and all—and we're going to town when we like. I'll be your Master. If you'll make me Master I'll see that Brother Silas goes on working. If he won't work, he shall go. Sister Phœbe, too. I'll look after your

Restoration. You shan't have any more black mud for coffee—and the chops and the steaks shan't be fried together in the same pan. And——'

Then Sister Phœbe flew upon her and dragged her off the table. And then—where was Meditation? Where was Elevation? There was a fierce struggle among the sisters, who rushed one after the other tearing and dragging at arms and skirts—and in the middle Sister Phœbe and Sister Euphemia shook each other. It was the meeting of the two great principles, Reform and Conservatism. As for the men, they looked on, troubled and uncertain.

The floor was strewed with the fallen: it was even strewed with torn skirts and fragments of sleeves. The cries of the combatants might have been heard as far as Aldermanbury.

Then suddenly the Sisters desisted: they ceased pulling and dragging each other:

they became ashamed of themselves, and they stood back, with panting chests and burning cheeks. Euphemia and Phœbe got up and pulled themselves straight and smoothed their hair with looks of war and determination, and again Euphemia the unconquered sprang upon the table.

'Make me the Master,' she said, 'and you shall have all that you have had already—and more—and more—and more. You shall have love if you like: you shall have books and newspapers: you shall have lectures and tea meetings. Make me your Master. Hold up your hands all who want me.'

A crowd of hands went up.

'All those who want the dumb man who can only eat and work hold up their hands.'

No one moved. The Community respected one who grew Pork so toothsome—beans so delicious: but Silas was inarticulate:

and his wife's temper and her tongue they all knew. At this point Gilbert shut the door and left them.

In case my reader should find himself in Aldermanbury, and should wish to visit the House of Meditation, he will learn that the innovators have quite prevailed. It is only a year since the Rebellion. The Fraternity exists and flourishes. It is now a Community of men and women who lead the Common Life, many of them being married : they have bought more land ; Brother Silas, who is not divorced, manages the farm with great skill and prudence, while his wife, who remains in all respects unchanged, manages the Dairy. Meditation survives ; but it is no longer practised by the majority. The younger members doubt its efficacy : their Pastor—for they have now a Chapel of their own Persuasion—openly derides Meditation ; they have a promising Literary Association : some of the associates have even proffered

Poems to the Magazines: they were rejected, but the mere production proclaims a newly-born intellectual activity. They have built reading-rooms and writing-rooms. They take in the newspapers and the magazines: they have started a Library: they get wandering lecturers to discourse before them and country companies to play before them: they have dances and they have concerts of their own. In fact, it is a very comfortable Community: Restoration continues to be plentiful and admirable: and the Sisters dress just as they please.

Gilbert closed the door and stood on the verandah looking about him. At the end of the lawn where the trees stood thick, so that as you have seen there was coolness and shade on the very hottest mornings, he saw his enemy sitting on the bench beside his sister's grave. He walked across the grass to meet him. Gilbert was no braggart, nor was he reckless of life, or indifferent to life:

on the contrary, he was as much attached to life as a young man in love should be. He knew that he was come to meet his fate: either to do what he had resolved to do: or to be himself destroyed: he knew and understood that very well. Yet he neither felt nor showed the least emotion. You have seen how he believed, with the strong faith of an early Christian, that things would in some way be made safe for him.

Sir Charles—we may give him his real name at last—rose and lifted his hat. He was no longer dressed in the uniform of the House, but in that of an English gentleman, with a long frock-coat, a white waistcoat, irreproachable linen, and a white flower in his button-hole.

'I expected you,' he said.

'Have you anything to propose?' asked Gilbert.

'In one moment. We understand each other, I think. You came here with the in-

tention of getting me out of the way—somehow.'

'You will admit that it is the only way of setting your wife free.'

'True. The only way. I have seen my wife and talked things over with her.'

'You have seen her? Lady Osterley came here? Who told her you were here?'

'You did—or perhaps Annandale, who came here; you sent him, too, I suppose—you would send half Piccadilly, if you could.'

'Your wife has been to see you! She told me nothing about it.'

'She even made me an offer—if I would live quietly. Women unfortunately do not understand. I cannot live quietly, as she calls it. Good Lord! man'—for one moment only he lost his external calm and showed emotion—'do you suppose it possible that I should have thrown away—what I have thrown away—if I could live quietly, as she calls it? My wife, I say, was good

enough to wonder how a man can live under these conditions. For me, I confess, life has but one pursuit to be named or thought of.' He stopped for a moment. 'Cicely has been to see me, too. Cicely, who is, it appears, my sister's child. She is like her mother. She came yesterday, at night; she walked all the way over from the town.'

'Yesterday? In the evening? After we all went to bed? Cicely came here last night? She must have walked over in a dream.'

'She came at midnight. She came to my room. I was asleep. She said that her mother sent her—my sister. Curious! my sister Alice. She sent me word that she would meet me—this evening—this evening. If I was a superstitious man, I should believe that you would win. But we shall see.'

'Your sister will meet you — to-night,' Gilbert repeated. 'If she said this——'

'I used to think that you put her up to the

messages. It seems ridiculous, but I cannot think so any longer. The Master yesterday morning came to offer me help — money. He said, very oddly, "I would offer you a hundred dollars, but it is useless. Five dollars will carry you on to Saturday evening. After that you will want no more." '

'The Master told you that?'

Gilbert observed that the man's look was changed. He had lost something from his iron face; the look that nothing could move. His eyes were restless: there was some kind of doubt—not fear—in them.

'You wish me to believe in these superstitions, I suppose. Well, sir, they shall not affect me in the least. Perhaps they were of your own devising?'

'No, they are not of my own devising.'

'Have you got any little message of the same kind for me?'

'None, I assure you.'

'Then, Mr. Maryon, we will proceed to business.'

'As you please.'

'I thought at first that we might use one of the workshops. There is no one at work this morning: they are all wrangling about something. But perhaps it is better to have things done in the open. I know a place up the stream a little way where we shall be undisturbed, and where you will be able to lie undiscovered for ever.'

'I follow you.'

Sir Charles rose from his seat: he was going to put his foot upon the flower-bed—his sister's grave — but remembered, and walked round it. He led the way across the lawn, past the workshops, to the stream. Then he turned to the left, where there was no path, but a narrow level way over grass up the bed of the stream.

Presently he turned sharply. 'Who is that with you?'

'There is no one.'

'I heard footsteps beside you.'

'Perhaps you hear the footsteps of Death. We have invited him.'

Sir Charles turned and went on without reply. Then he stopped.

'What are you whispering for?' He turned again.

'I am not whispering.'

'There is someone with you whispering.'

'I hear the rustle of the leaves and the babbling of the water over the stones. There is no whisper.'

'Look here! You have been trying to frighten me with your damned messages! You have set on that girl to worry me. You think at the last moment to shake my nerves with whispers and footsteps.'

'Have it as you please. I have sent you messages from your sister. Put it any way you please.'

Sir Charles made no reply, but turned and

continued to lead the way. A few minutes brought them to the place where one of them might lie comfortably undiscovered for ever.

It was the same place where, under the disapproving eyes of Sister Phœbe, Gilbert had made love to Cicely. The same place, now sacred to the memory of Love and Life, soon, perhaps, to be sacred to the memory of Death and Murder. There rose the low cliff —a rock of shade and shelter ; there lay the little green level between rock and stream : there were the overhanging wild vines : and there the projecting shelf of rock about four feet high and so many broad which Gilbert remembered : it would make a table fit for the Ordeal by Cards. On the other side of the stream was the forest, whose solitudes were never disturbed except by minx and snake. The place was perfectly silent save for the sough of the light summer breeze in the branches and the babbling of the brook.

It was a place sacred to Love and Life, and these men were going to desecrate it by calling on Death to pollute it.

'Will this suit you?' Sir Charles asked.

'Perfectly.'

Sir Charles seated himself on one corner of the rock shelf. This again gave him an advantage over his adversary, who was standing. One who stands before another who sits is an inferior or an accused person or a servant.

'When we last discussed this matter,' he said, 'I mentioned a case similar to our own which was decided by a game of cards. It might be objected that the man who won had probably prepared the cards beforehand. As he understood perfectly how to prepare a pack of cards, it is very possible that he did do so. Few would blame him. Knowledge is power. But I propose, since we two are going to end our quarrel in the same manner, that there shall be no possibility of preparing the cards

beforehand: no possibility even of a suspicion.'

'I accept.'

'We shall play *for the revolver*. That is understood. The stake is the possession of that revolver which I see is in your pocket. Take it out. So. Is it loaded? Very good. Lay it down on the rock between us. We will have the stake on the table. You may fully trust me, sir. On this occasion I will not touch the revolver or play you false in any particular. You shall be treated as a gentleman by—one who understands what that word means.'

Gilbert obeyed. He had no distrust of the man, who seemed to have become a man of honour once more: perhaps his appearance in the garb of an English gentleman helped him to this comfortable pretence.

The revolver, then, lay between them. They stood one on each side of the rock table. Gilbert listened to the music of the

stream over the stones, and saw the fish darting to and fro in the shallows. Over his head hung the fresh green leaves and the branches of the wild vine. Perhaps he saw these things and felt the warmth of the air, and the splendour of the sun, and heard the rustle of the trees for the last time. Yet he was not afraid. He was neither anxious nor afraid. And as for the other man, he was like one who prepares to sit down at his club to play at whist for half-crown points—as cool and as undisturbed. When he held the cards in his hand his eyes lost their restless look : he became once more keen and cold and self-possessed.

'You have brought no cards with you, of course. I thought not. Here is a new and uncut pack — which I found in my portmanteau.' He drew the pack from his pocket. 'I wish you to examine the fastenings carefully, in order to satisfy yourself that it is a new and unopened pack. It is, in fact,

an English pack which has been lying in my portmanteau for two years. You are satisfied? Very well. Cut the string yourself.' He gave his adversary the pack. 'Now—shuffle the cards yourself and cut them yourself; I do not suspect you—in fact, you don't know how to shuffle—and you shall have no cause for suspicion of me. So. Can you play écarté?'

'I can.'

'I probably play better than you, but I should have that advantage whatever game was proposed. Écarté is a short, quick game—much too short for such a stake as ours. I should like to play all night long for such a noble stake. All night long—to rise at six o'clock—the winner.'

'To make it longer, we will play for two games out of three.'

'Very good. Let us cut. Your deal, Mr. Maryon;' his eyes flashed: he became suddenly murderous: 'you understand quite

well—if I win, it is my intention to kill you. I shall have no mercy upon you. It was to kill me out of the way that you came here. Very good. I shall kill you and bury you here in this quiet place, where no one will ever look for you or find you. I shall kill you, besides, because you have turned me out of my only refuge: because, I firmly believe, you have brought the police upon me. And because you have endeavoured to cover all up with hypocritical pretences about my dead sister. You quite understand?'

'Perfectly.'

Gilbert dealt.

Sir Charles took up his hand, and marked the king. 'I play.' He played: he took every trick. The next deal was his own.

'I propose,' said Gilbert.

'No;' and marked the king again.

They played the hand. The first game, quickly despatched, went to Sir Charles.

They began the second game. It was

absurd. Again—twice—Sir Charles marked the king and took every trick. Never before, in any Ordeal on record, by cards, by fire, by water, was Judgment more clearly declared than in this. The second game was his, too. Two games out of three. And Gilbert had lost.

So strong was his faith in the messages that, even at that moment of defeat, he felt no fear.

Sir Charles collected and put up the cards in their wrapper and dropped the pack in his pocket, without the least hurry.

'We were playing,' he said quietly, 'for the revolver. It is, you will acknowledge, mine.'

'It is yours,' said Gilbert.

Sir Charles took it up and looked at it. 'A pretty thing,' he said; 'I know the make and the maker. Now, Mr. Maryon.' He was sitting on the rock; Gilbert was standing at the other side. Sir Charles raised his arm and pointed the revolver. Not even

then did the bitterness of death assail him: the words of the message rang in his brain: 'What must be done shall be done.' And the words of the Master: 'Have no fear: for all is well.' The dark circle of the pistol's mouth by which was the way of death had no terrors for him.

Suddenly the hand that held the pistol dropped. Sir Charles started, looked round, and changed colour: and to his eyes there returned the look of doubt and anxiety. He laid down the pistol. He stood up and looked round again. He was bareheaded: the fingers of his right hand rested on the rock table, those of the left played with his watch-chain. Just so he had stood scores of times in the House of Commons amid a hailstorm of cries and questions. Just as he had looked then, just as austere, save for that look of perplexity, so he looked now, preparing for a murder in cold blood.

'The place is haunted,' he said. 'By

what trickery did you knock down my hand? Who the devil have you brought with you?'

'I have brought nobody. As for the messages, they are true: you will not kill me. This evening, Sir Charles, you will meet your sister, as she warned you. I have only to say that I did not bring Lady Osterley here: that I did not send Annandale over here: that I did not invent any message: that I have not communicated with the police.'

Sir Charles made no reply whatever. He looked as if he had not heard. He took up the revolver again and looked at it. Was he going to raise the weapon once more?

'What must be done shall be done—but not by your hands.' Again the words went ringing through Gilbert's brain.

Sir Charles replaced the revolver on the table.

'Take it up,' said Gilbert.

'What do you mean?'

'Take the revolver. It is yours.'

'Sir,' said Sir Charles, 'we played a fair game for life; I won. You have nothing to complain of. I am quite justified in killing you. It has been a fair duel.'

'A very fair duel. We played for the revolver, and I lost. It is yours.'

'Then you own that I am justified.' He took up the pistol.

'In killing yourself? Quite.'

'No, in killing you.'

'The revolver gives you the choice. You can kill either yourself or me.'

'Why should I kill myself?'

'I think I can make that clear.'

'You would have killed me if you had won.'

'I should not have been permitted to do so. You won, and the choice was not even left to me.'

'If you think to save your life by pretence and lies, you are mistaken.'

'You will not kill me.'

Sir Charles sat down again. 'Explain, if you please,' he said coldly.

'Sir Charles'—Gilbert spoke solemnly and slowly—'in the whole of this business I have been led. I cannot choose but believe that I have been led from the very beginning, and that by the dead hand of your sister Alice, who died in this place twenty years ago. She has led me through her daughter, and through her old friend the Master. You may scoff—but this is not a moment for scoffing. She has warned you. Had you shown any signs of repentance she would have preserved you. There were no such signs. The time has come when you will be permitted to work no more evil. I did not understand at first, but now she makes me understand every step.'

'She makes you understand? Are you mad? You are all gone mad, I think, about my sister Alice.'

'Consider, Sir Charles. You are in a

position of deadly peril: you are a notorious criminal—we need not at this moment explain. If you step outside this place you will be very speedily arrested. Your identification is quite certain, because you cannot disguise yourself: once arrested, your photograph will be taken and published in every paper in the United States, so great is the interest taken in your remarkable career——'

'Pray go on, sir.' For Gilbert paused and hesitated.

'Only one thing is wanting, and your photograph will inform the world of your true name and your true career. Imagine, if you can, the delight of the Americans at having an ex-Minister of the British Cabinet in such a position. Now this is the danger which we are so anxious to avert. It affects the honour and the happiness of those at home, who are still in ignorance of your record—your mother and sister: it affects the whole future of your son: it affects your niece,

Cicely Moulton. The danger has been provided for, but not by us : it exists, in fact, no longer, for you will meet your sister Alice this evening.'

Sir Charles stood with the pistol in his hand motionless : unmoved externally.

'Was it accident,' Gilbert went on, 'I ask you to consider, that brought you here to the house where your sister died and her child has lived? Was it accident that brought her here? Was it accident that brought your wife here? Was it accident that brought Annandale—your old friend—here to discover where you were hidden? Was it accident that determined this game of cards? You have the revolver : you know what use to make of it. If you use it rightly, you will die under a false name ; nobody will know anything about you except the one or two who are certain not to talk. Is that accident? You have won the game and the revolver. If you use it wrongly, you will most certainly

be arrested, put to a shameful death, and bring shame and suffering inconceivable upon your own people.'

Sir Charles stood up and looked round upon the sunshine and the hills. The most dreadful thing in Death, said the Greek, was to lose the sunshine and the light.

'I believe you are right,' he said. 'You stand for my wife and my people. They have cause for complaint, I suppose. For their sake, I ought not to face the publicity of the electric-machine. Well, sir, you have won. I don't acknowledge your theory of the leading, but—in fact, you have won. I will pay this debt of honour. But not by daylight. Let it be at night, and in the place that I shall choose.'

'Good. Let it be where you please—but some time to-day.'

'You mentioned my son—I have no desire, certainly, to bring upon him any kind of—social stigma—I hope that he may be

led to believe in the outward respectability of his father. It is for his sake, and for no other reason, that I accept the award, and your reading of the oracle.' He dropped the pistol into his pocket. 'The revolver is mine; I promise you to discharge this debt in the course of the day.'

'Can I trust you?'

'I don't know why you should. If you do not—here is the revolver;' he took it from his pocket and offered it. 'Settle this business at once.'

'I do trust you, Sir Charles.'

'About my sister Alice,' he spoke with a strange hesitation; 'if it is really possible—I may learn the truth this evening—if she has brought about this termination—she would naturally be prejudiced against my way of life. . . . She was always proud of the family name—she may have designed this chain of accidents. . . . The family name—there was never a madman in it before. Well,

I will actually leave it uninjured—after all.' His manner was changed: his eyes lost their hardness, and his very voice became soft. Yet he preserved his pride of carriage.

'And how shall I learn——?'

'I think that if you happen to be on the Quay of Aldermanbury at about eleven this evening, or perhaps at midnight—I have a few dollars to get rid of first—you will have an opportunity of proving my trustworthiness. And now, sir, we have said enough.' He assumed once more the manner of a Cabinet Minister granting an audience.

'May I bear any message to Lady Osterley?'

'None, sir, I thank you.' He bowed and gently waved his hand.

Gilbert, unable to meet his manner with corresponding dignity, bowed in his turn and walked away. At the next bend of the river, he looked round. The man was playing some game, or practising some trick, with the cards upon the shelf of rock.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FREEDOM.

GILBERT returned slowly to the House, where his carriage waited for him. Not then. Not till many days afterwards; not till something of the strength and reality in the message had died away in his heart, did he realize the danger he had run in losing that game. His mind for the moment was filled with a kind of awe and of pity for the austere man whose outward show of pride rose higher as his life grew more shameful. That the man would die he was perfectly certain; but why should he wait until the evening? And why should he appoint the Quay of

Aldermanbury for the verification of his promise?

As he passed the door of the Hall he could hear the noise of the quarrelling community, but he was in no mood to interest himself further in their wrangle. He drove straight back to the city. Everything that day stood out in contrast. On the one side stood Death about to strike his victim, a tall pale man, proud and stern of face, who stood with folded hands and waited with no sign of fear. On the other side were the brethren and sisters of the monastery wrangling like ordinary mortals of the lower class, and showing the failure of Meditation, since, after all these years, it had left them all on so low a level. On the other side, too, he remembered the peace and rest and confidence in Cicely's eyes. He could not bear to look at them for thinking of the awful end awaiting the man to whom she had taken that message.

'What is the matter with you, Gilbert?'

asked Lady Osterley. 'And why cannot you sit still?'

'I suppose it is the great heat of the day.'

'It is always hot here—I think I like the heat—and it certainly suits the boy. Cicely was telling me about the House, Gilbert, and about your first coming to it, only a few weeks ago.'

'Five weeks,' said Cicely—'five weeks to-day.'

She appeared to remember nothing about the message and the long and lonely walk of last night.

'Only five weeks ago?' Gilbert took her hand. 'And so much has happened to this dear child since then. The world was Outside then—a terrible, wicked, deadly world. The day was divided into portions like a Benedictine Monastery — only one day exactly like another. Fatigue and Repose: Meditation and Elevation: Restoration and Retirement. Then there was the dancing.

You have seen her dance, Dorabyn, but only once. I have seen her every evening, and I never got tired of it.'

Cicely blushed. 'I must never dance again,' she said, 'because I am not to meditate any more. I began when I was quite a little girl. I danced because no one could see me—they were all in Meditation: and so—somehow—it helped me to fall into Meditation. So I kept on—and Gilbert saw me.'

'I should like to see you again,' said Lady Osterley. 'You will dance often to us—won't you?'

'No—I should be ashamed.'

'We have got a great deal to teach her, Dorabyn. We must teach her not to be ashamed of doing clever and graceful things. Dear me, Cicely, when we go home—which will be next week——'

Lady Osterley looked up. It was the second time that Gilbert had uttered that prediction.

'Next week,' he repeated, looking in her face. She saw something written on his face; she turned pale, and trembled.

Then she sprang to her feet. 'Come with me, Gilbert,' she said, and led the way into the inner room. 'Now'—she turned upon him almost fiercely—'what do you mean by saying that we may go home next week?'

'I mean that you may leave this place to-morrow: that you may leave New York by the first boat that sails: that you may go home, to your own country house, and see once more your friends and—yes—your husband's friends as well.'

'Tell me more.'

'I will tell you all—this evening.'

'Oh! this evening—not till then? This evening. There are hours to get through. Gilbert—there is but one way. Oh! tell me—how?—how? God forgive me for desiring his death, but it is the only way.'

'It is the only way. Therefore——'

'Not by your hands, Gilbert!' She caught those hands, and whispered: 'No—no! Not by your hands! Anything—anything but that!'

'No—not by my hands. Dorabyn, if you have ever doubted that the spirit of a good woman may protect and guide those whom she loves, doubt it no longer.'

'You mean Cicely's mother?'

'Yes, I seem to understand it all so well. It was Alice who led her brother to the House—it was the only place in the whole habitable globe where he could be safe from the hands of Justice. Once arrested, his portrait would have been taken and sent to all the papers: he would have been recognised: all the world would have known the truth: and your boy, Dorabyn—Alice's nephew—would have had a life-long disgrace to bear. I say that she led her brother to this place where her only daughter was living: she led me after him: she sent him a message urging him even at this late moment to change his

manner of life: she sent me a message ordering me to put off my purpose for five weeks: she brought you here so that you might see him once more, and might offer him the means of living in honesty. She even brought Annandale here, so that he might tell the world that he saw him, that he was quite mad, and that I was watching him for you. Mind, the whole thing is complete: the case hangs together perfectly. Two more messages were sent: one to me —namely, that what had to be done should be done, but not by my hands: and one to him—the last message—it was delivered to him by Cicely last night at midnight——'

'Why, I saw her in bed at ten.'

'At midnight: she must have got up and walked all the way there and back: a lonely walk for a girl: eight miles: but she was protected by her mother.'

'What was the message?'

'She must have been in trance of some

kind. The message was very serious. It was a warning that he would meet his sister next day—this day.'

'How did he take it?'

'At first he received it in his cold and superior way—you have seen him. It was part of my conspiracy against him: it was I who had brought about his expulsion: it was I who was bringing the police upon him. We played——'

'You played?'

'Life for life—with a pack of cards, Dorabyn, but I knew very well what would be the result if we played—and I won—that is to say, I lost the game, and he won—the revolver.'

'Well?'

'Then I told him, as solemnly as I could, how the spirit of his sister had been working for him—to save him and his family from disgrace. He broke down—so far as such a man can break down. He even spoke of the

family name. He is, so far, broken, Dorabyn. He will save the name—and the boy—from disgrace. And oh!'—the tears crowded into his eyes—'the shame and the pity of it! Yet he will keep his word—I am sure of it—I know it—he will meet his sister this evening.'

'You left him to take his own life? Oh! it is horrible; and yet—yet——'

'He will take his own life with his own hand. Of that you may rest perfectly assured, Dorabyn. This evening you will be free, and your son will be safe, and your husband's name and fame and honour will remain unblemished in the eyes of the world.'

'Tell me no more, Gilbert. Leave me alone to think. I must find some pity for him, if I can. Oh, if it is in very truth the last day of this man's life, I must try to remember that once I respected him—once, for a brief week, I even thought I loved him. Leave me, Gilbert; take Cicely somewhere —I want to be alone all day. I must

pray for him—and for myself—and for my boy.'

Her eyes were full of tears: her lips were trembling. Gilbert left her to her prayers, and softly closed the door.

There was a boat which called at Aldermanbury about one o'clock. Gilbert found that he could go down the river for three or four hours; land at a certain place forty miles down, and return by train. He took Cicely with him, and widened Outside for her, thus beguiling for himself the weary hours of waiting.

There were no more messages: Cicely looked for none: the final message had come: she knew that she must desire no more converse with her mother until another change: but she had begun to live in this world: the next had already lost some of its attractions: already the House was left behind, soon to be forgotten in new interests and with new friends, and there was something new to learn; something new to observe, every

moment. She was like one who runs about on a newly-discovered island.

They steamed down the noble river: they heard the echoes in the mountains where Rip Van Winkle played at bowls; they marked the cliffs and rocks and the hanging woods: an impertinent band played a selection from Offenbach's operas; but even that did not spoil the woods and mountains, and the broad breadth of river: they sat under the awning and looked out upon the sunny hills: and with the bright and eager girl to ask questions continually, Gilbert almost forgot the Ordeal of the morning and the dreadful purpose of the winner.

It was ten o'clock when they reached the station on their return. Gilbert took Cicely back to the hotel, where the Master sat in the corner in his usual attitude—feet out, hands folded—head back—in his customary meditation. Annandale was looking on in a kind of stupor.

'Look here,' he whispered. 'He just sat down—put out his feet, and went off—like that. Thank God you have come back, Gilbert! What are we to do? Lady Osterley is in her own room with a headache. Shall I run for a doctor?'

'No—no—do nothing. He goes off like this every evening. It's the regular thing with him. Talk as loud as you like, Annandale, he won't hear. It is a strange custom, but it is the custom of his Fraternity.'

'It looks creepy. Does he say things? It would be like a voice from the Tombs.'

'We can leave him in charge of Cicely. You know the Master's ways, don't you, Cicely? As for you and me, Annandale, we will just go out and have a cigar on the Quay. The air from the river will be fresher than in the street—come.'

They went out: it is not far from the hotel to the Quay: two steamers lay alongside: the Quay was deserted save for two or

three low saloons, of which we have already heard. There the lights were brilliant, and there the noise of voices showed that life, even on so hot a night, still has an animated side.

'They are gambling,' said Annandale, looking into one. 'Faugh! what an intolerable stink of bad whisky and bad gas! I wonder what they are playing. Why, Gilbert—see! see!—there is Sir Charles Osterley—the man you have been looking after! Sir Charles himself! Oh, he must be awfully mad! How did you come to leave him?'

Gilbert looked in.

'Yes—it is Sir Charles.' In fact, the loser of the game was playing with eagerness at a dirty table among three or four common men. 'I suppose they let him out. I was not his keeper, you know. I agree with you. He must be very mad indeed to come to such a place as this.'

'I thought he was religious mad. There

isn't much religion in this. Sir Charles Osterley, of all men, to be found in such a den! Why, the fellows look like stokers.'

'We had best not interfere, Annandale. I suppose that he fancies himself someone else. Come; he will be looked after, and it would be best for him not to see us.'

He drew Annandale away, and they resumed their walk up and down the Quay.

'I can think of nothing else,' said Annandale. 'That poor madman! I found him by accident. Of course I told Lady Osterley that I had discovered her secret. That explained everything: your presence here—you and your confounded strawberries; his presence here; her coming here—I thought it was to see you—and, of course, she knew all along; her silence about him—— Why, his own mother hasn't been told. And now to find him, after he'd been religious mad, in a low class gambling den like this! It's wonderful, Gilbert.'

'Yes,' said Gilbert sadly. 'Some things are too wonderful to be believed at all.'

'All the same, you're a good fellow to look after him. What are you going to do with him? Leave him?—stay with him?'

'I fear he cannot be left. We must wait—something may happen—he may recover—he may——'

He stopped, because just then, as the clock began to strike eleven, two shots in rapid succession struck upon his ear.

'What is that?' asked Annandale. 'The shots came from that place.'

The voices, which had been very noisy, quieted for a moment; then they began all over again.

Tramp—tramp came the footsteps of men bearing something; they came out of the saloon in the dark night, they laid their burden on the stones of the street, the face covered with a handkerchief.

'He's dead,' said one of the bearers.

'He'd lost all his money, every dollar, and he jest stood up and blew out his brains before anyone could say anything. He's quite dead.'

Gilbert stooped and lifted the handkerchief. Then with a shudder he placed it back. The man's eyes were wide open, and they seemed to say, 'I have kept my promise.'

And once more the words of the message rang through Gilbert's brain :

'That which must be done shall be done—but not by your hands.'

'Come,' he said, 'we can do nothing. The body will be looked after. Come home, I will tell Lady Osterley. And—Annandale—not a word to Cicely. She need not be alarmed.'

'Shall we tell these people who he is?'

'By no means—why should we parade the fact that Sir Charles Osterley blew out his brains in a vile gambling den? We must not

proclaim abroad that this suicide was once an English statesman. This must be our secret, Annandale. Mad, you know he was—and in the House of Cranks. All the world may know that. But not the place or the manner of his end. Let us keep that secret, for the sake of Dorabyn, to ourselves, Annandale.'

They went back to the hotel. 'I am best out of the way, Gilbert. I shall go to my own room,' said Annandale. 'Come presently, and we will talk.'

'Ask Dorabyn if I may speak to her, Cicely.'

The Master was still in Meditation. Cicely was sitting in the dark, waiting in her patient way. She had not yet acquired the Outside habit of always doing something—reading for instance—and I think she never will. The habit of Meditation will always remain with her in a milder form.

'Stay, Cicely—one moment. Have you any more messages for me?'

'Nothing, Gilbert. My mother has left off talking to me. She leaves me to you—oh! Gilbert—to you!'

He kissed her solemnly.

'Your mother has spoken again to-day, dear. She has spoken to me directly: she has guided me through a great and terrible danger. Now I must go to Dorabyn.'

She received him in the dark. It was best that such a message should be received in the dark.

'Tell me—tell me, Gilbert.'

'He is dead, Dorabyn.'

'How?'

'By his own hand. He died where he mostly loved to live—in a gambling den.'

'Is it known who he was?'

'Annandale saw him—I thought it well that Annandale, who saw him alive, should know that he is dead. Annandale is persuaded that he was mad. Now you can go home, Dorabyn. You can write to his people,

truthfully, that he disappeared — truthfully, that you went in search of him—truthfully, that he was found by me in a religious community—truthfully, that he broke out, apparently, in a new place, and that he killed himself—if they want to know more—in a gambling den. It is a tale of madness, no worse. For the general world it will be enough to announce that Sir Charles Osterley died at Aldermanbury, New York State, on such and such a day.'

'Yes—yes—I shall understand better, perhaps, in a little while.'

'Meantime, Dorabyn—at last—you are free!'

THE END.

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